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"Home has so many meanings": Society's issues personified through baseball

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“Home Has So Many Meanings”:
Society’s Issues Personified Through Baseball

A Project Presented to The Faculty of the Undergraduate
College of Arts and Letters and The Honors Program
James Madison University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the JMU Honors Program

By Mark Andrew Overstreet
May 2014

Accepted by the faculty of the Department of English and The Honors Program, James Madison University, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts and the Honors Program.

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Dedication

to my parents, for keeping my sails straight,
to my brother, for helping me to make my sails bigger and broader,
and,
to my many mentors, who helped shape my sails to look like sails instead of Play-Doh

Preface

“At the funeral, Jessie Jackson did the eulogy, and he said Jackie Robinson stole home, and he’s safe. And that, even now, is very important to me. Giamatti said it best, you make the trip around the bases and somehow you land at home, and home has so many meanings, and so many meanings for people like us who for whom family and home were the central basis of our operation. I mean we were family people, we were people who always had a home, and we always could come home and it was a retreat from a world that can lay a lot of heavy things on you, so I carried that blow-up from room for weeks because looking at it, I knew he was safe. Nobody could hurt him again, he wouldn’t hear the name calling, only the cheers, and somehow I could fantasize my own little story about where he was and how he was doing, and let him rest in peace.” –Rachel Robinson, in Ken Burns’ Documentary “Baseball”

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Abstract

The theatre as an art form has a reflective role in society: to inform the public of injustice, to critique the current society, and to incite positive social and political change. Three American playwrights, George Abbott, August Wilson, and Richard Greenberg, accomplished this role in their plays *Damn Yankees*, *Fences*, and *Take Me Out*, respectively. Because of the form of a play, a live audience views the art as it unfolds before them, therefore engaging audiences with the characters and the dialogue, the plot, and the messages the plays deliver all at the same time. These three plays exist in the onstage world of baseball, providing an integral setting to the substantive contemporary issues of American society, through the society's symbolic national pastime. As a result, *Damn Yankees*, *Fences*, and *Take Me Out* force the audience to confront the issues in the society in which they live, and leave the audience with an emotional response that can influence positive evolution. Binding Abbott, Wilson, and Greenberg's three plays together through their sixty year difference in release date is a critical illustration of society during each time period, and a basic idea of language: what language can do, what language means, and how language can influence society.

Home Plate

The Introduction

Broadway Theatre has been a staple in the arts of American society since the middle of the eighteenth century, and theatre productions have evolved from the days of the Greek dramas, to Shakespeare, to Barnum's circus theatre, to musicals, and now to sports drama. The theater itself has undergone just as much change as theater's role has in society. For example, theatre in ancient Greece marked the beginning of the tragedy and comedy. But, as civilization evolved, the theatre became more of a place for the "play" and for drama. Shakespearean theater of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries featured history plays and comedies with actors presenting audiences with, in most cases, accurate renditions of important events in history. Even during Shakespeare's time, monarchs censored specific scenes in plays that portrayed the government in compromising ways. In addition, many religious institutions boycotted the theatre during Shakespeare's time because many felt that actors were thieves stealing from the audience.¹ Unlike the British, freedom of speech prevented the censorship of American plays. What differentiates playhouses and the theatre from other forms of entertainment is the live nature of the performance. There are no second chances if an actor forgets a line, and the audience is different every night. The feedback that an actor and an audience share with one another is paramount to the experience of the play.

The play as an art form has a larger task in society than to simply entertain. Plays have the duty, as August Wilson argued, to "politiciz[e] the community" as well as "raise

¹ It was a common belief during Shakespeare's time that in order for something to warrant payment, a tangible product must result. For the theater, there is no tangible product in return for the fee of entrance. Also, the actors played a role, thus deceived the audience as to whom they really are, and "stealing" an identity.

consciousness of the people.”² The theatre also has the duty to critique the current society, whether the issues focus on gay rights, women’s rights, civil rights, or other social issues. Plays both critique and reflect their society, which is the case in *Damn Yankees*, *Fences*, and *Take Me Out*. In the few examples of sports plays that exist, the play as an art form accomplishes its social goals. But three playwrights, George Abbot, August Wilson and Richard Greenberg chose to put America’s pastime, baseball, on the stage to engage with and critique integral issues in American society in the second half of the twentieth century. Abbott critiques women’s rights in his 1955 play *Damn Yankees*, Wilson discusses civil rights in his 1987 play *Fences*, and Greenberg presents gay rights in *Take Me Out*, which he published in 2002.

Historically, baseball has been labeled as “America’s Pastime,” and the love for the game of baseball runs deeply in American society. Baseball itself is an interesting reflection on American society because of the way the game is played. Unlike in any other sport, the object of the game is to leave home plate, and then return to home to score points. As former commissioner of baseball Angelo Bartlett Giamatti said, “you make the trip around the bases and somehow you land at home.”³ There is a cyclical nature to baseball, where a player must take a chance and leave the safety of home plate in order to succeed, just as the American public is urged to become inventors, or entrepreneurs, and take chances.⁴ If the baseball player makes it back around to home, the chance is considered a success.

However, baseball is the one sport where the statistical likelihood of each at-bat for a

² August Wilson, Interview with David Savran in Bryer, Jackson R., and Mary C. Hartig, *Conversations With August Wilson*. (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006), p. 21.

³ Rachel Robinson, in Ken Burns’ documentary “Baseball,” 1994.

⁴ Jacoby, Karl. “Go West Young Man! Horace Greeley’s Vision for America.” *Journal of the Early Republic*. 15.4 (1995 Winter): 698-699.

player to reach first base safely is low, meaning failure is an accepted part of the game. But built into the game is a second at bat, and a third and sometimes fourth chance that a batter can reach safely, and eventually return home to score. American society is filled with the expectation that everyone deserves a second chance, and that America is the “land of opportunity.” American capitalism also asserts that there must be a winner and a loser. Similarly, built into the rules of baseball is an unlimited amount of time to determine a winner, some games going into 10 or more extra innings, the longest taking more than 8 hours and lasting twenty five innings.⁵ The lack of a time clock in baseball is an attraction for Americans. Many industrialized cities built stadiums in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, where factory workers who watched the clock all day were able to come to the ballpark and suspend time for the duration of the game, no matter how long the game lasts.⁶

Like American society, baseball has changed over time, Baseball began as a sport played in the daylight until the Cincinnati Reds installed floodlights on Crosley Field in 1935 to allow fans to attend games after work. The rules of the game have changed as well. At first, games were allowed to end in a tie after the customary nine innings, batters were allowed to call for pitches from the pitcher, and it took four strikes to strike out instead of three.⁷ When whites segregated baseball in 1887, blacks formed the Negro leagues, which remained the only way blacks could play professional baseball until 1947, when Brooklyn Dodger owner Branch Rickey integrated professional baseball with Jackie Robinson, who

⁵ Wolf, Rick. *The Baseball Encyclopedia*. 9th ed. New York: Macmillian Publishing, 1993.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

has become the most famous and influential baseball player in history.⁸ Robinson's number remains the only number to ever be retired from baseball. The spirit of Rickey's action was repeated the following year, when Harry Truman integrated the military in 1948. Slowly, African Americans have served in higher and higher ranking government positions. For example, Thurgood Marshall was the first African American to serve on the Supreme Court in 1967 and in 2008 Barack Obama became the first African American to serve as President. While baseball is America's pastime, and reflects society, it also shatters social inequality, and illustrates flaws that society may not be willing to acknowledge.

The play as an art form and baseball share the commonality of reflecting and influencing society, and being performed live. Humanities professor Harry Elam Jr., discussed the importance of theater to American society, writing that "the *idea* of America as the 'land of the free and home of the brave,' as a place where 'all *men* are created equal' and entitled to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,' has come into conflict with the *realities* of America."⁹ Elam commented that because of this conflict, "who Americans are, and how they define themselves has never been a matter of concrete certainty. Rather each new age has seen American identity forged and re-forged in crisis, constructed and re-constructed around issues of difference."¹⁰ Elam noted the theatricality of American society, from the media's influence on society, to the development of "America's sense of self," to the "commodification" of "American life and culture,"¹¹ citing the example of the

⁸ Ribowsky, Mark. *A complete History of the Negro Leagues*. Secaucus, NJ: Carol Publishing Group, 1995.

⁹ Elam, Harry J. "'Only in America': Contemporary American Theatre and the Power of Performance." *Voices of Power; Co-Operation and Conflict in English Language and Literature*. 1997: p. 151

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ibid

Gulf War and the Commander of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who quickly became a media star, by “elid[ing] the separation of the real and the fictive.”¹² The vast media influence on society has allowed for accidental public figures, those who are thrust into the spotlight without intent, to become famous because of an anomalous event. This phenomenon is one of many ways media coverage can either raise a “real” issue into the spotlight, or raise a “fictive” issue that does not hold societal merit or warrant media coverage.

In Elam’s opinion, the idea of the separation between the “real” and the “fictitious” allowed playwrights like August Wilson, David Hwang, Suzan-Lori Parks and others to turn “real events, actual socio-political occurrences as the subject matter and settings for their texts,” something Elam called a “theatrical experiment.”¹³ Elam suggested these “experiments” and the theater in general can both critique and illuminate “volatile power relationships” and change American culture, while remaining creative entertainment. As society has evolved, according to Elam, “theatrical performance has become an increasingly potent site for the examination and destabilization of the real or the re-negotiation of American identity,” because of the issues of “race, gender, and diversity pervade the national conscience” alongside society’s rapid increase in “theatricalized” social interactions.¹⁴ However, the theatre does more than relate to the American socio-political environment. It also moves “beyond American relevancies” and displays the dichotomies, paradoxes, and issues within human society as a whole.

A common thread binding *Damn Yankees*, *Fences*, and *Take Me Out* together is each character’s conflict between the individual and society and the resulting moral implications

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid, 152

¹⁴ Ibid.

that the conflict presents. In all three plays, society ultimately trumps the individual, in part because of each character's failure with language. Language has the ability to define, to attack, defend, disturb, fail, succeed, confound, build, and destroy. Abbott, Wilson, and Greenberg also utilize America's pastime to tell their stories, but confront their audiences with messages that challenge most Americans' notions of baseball and their own culture and society.

1st Base:

Damn Yankees

Damn Yankees first reached the American public as the book *The Year the Yankees Lost The Pennant* by Douglass Wallop in 1954. Wallop and director George Abbott produced Wallop's story as the musical *Damn Yankees* on Broadway in 1955. *Damn Yankees* ran for 1,019 performances, and won seven of the nine Tony Awards for which it was nominated in 1956, including best musical. Abbott began working on Broadway as an actor, producer, and writer in 1913, and remained on Broadway for most of his life. Abbott produced *Damn Yankees* with Wallop when Abbott was sixty-eight years old. Wallop wrote *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant* when he was thirty-four years old, and the age difference between Wallop and Abbott influences the text on a thematic level. Wallop grew up in the patriarchal society of the 1920s and 1930s while Abbott epitomized the dominant, patriarchal male figure during the 1920s and 1930s. When Abbott and Wallop edited the book into a Broadway musical in 1955, Abbott undoubtedly dominated the editing process of the book, thus proving the thematic material in the story to be true in the production of the musical itself.

Damn Yankees begins with a middle-aged suburban man named Joe Boyd, who is unhappy with his life. Joe's responsibilities as a husband have usurped his dream, which is to play professional baseball. The play quickly introduces Mr. Applegate, who offers Joe the chance to play professional baseball for Joe's favorite team, the Washington Senators. Mr. Applegate promises that Joe will be the star of the team, and that the Senators will win the pennant, beating the "Damn Yankees." Mr. Applegate's price is Joe's soul, which Joe feels reluctant to give up until Joe concocts an escape clause that would nullify the contract should Joe decide to return to his wife. Once the agreement is finalized, Joe leaves his wife, Meg, and previous life behind to pursue his dream.

Mr. Applegate quickly introduces Joe to the Washington Senators baseball manager, and Joe proves his super-star abilities in a practice session with the other members of the team, a few fans, and reporter Gloria Thorpe in attendance. The Senators' manager gives Joe a one-year contract to play for the team, and within a couple of games, turns the Senators' season around. Joe is suddenly, and Gloria questions Joe about his past. Applegate and Joe lie, saying Joe is from Hannibal Missouri. As the season progresses, Joe begins to miss Meg, and the choice between Joe's adolescent dream and Joe's common, middle-aged life, becomes increasingly difficult. In order to persuade Joe to remain faithful to the contract, Applegate summons Lola, the sexual temptress. Lola's seduction techniques prove to be useless as Joe wishes to return to his wife.

Eventually, Gloria uncovers the lies that Applegate and Joe have fed the public. Applegate frantically attempts to preserve Joe's contract by telling Gloria that Joe is an ex-convict and con artist, and the scandal unravels in court proceedings. But, on the last day of Joe's contract with Applegate, despite the turmoil Joe faces in the scandal, Lola, who now loves Joe, sacrifices herself so that Joe can exercise the escape clause, avoid the criminal charges, avoid the clutches of Applegate, and return to Meg. On the surface, the story has a "happy ending." *New Yorker* critic Alcott Gibbs opined that in addition to the "happy" story, *Damn Yankees* featured "some remarkably spirited songs and dances [and] a choral group of actors who actually look as if they were throwing baseballs rather than daises."¹⁵ However, Gibbs wrote that "behind the mask of the joviality of choral group of actors,"

¹⁵ Gibbs, Alcott. "Beezlebub Blanks Yanks." *The New Yorker* 14 May 1955: p. 132.

namely Gwen Verdon, Stephen Doublass, and Ray Walston, lies deep cultural significances of the 1950s, most of which do not result in a “happy ending.”¹⁶

Theatre professor Jessica Sternfeld looks past the light-hearted nature of the musical, and comments that the performance “sets forth several very powerful cultural points. In a 1950s America that championed the hard-working middle-class suburban family, it must have been comforting—if not entirely convincing—to see a story that argued that one’s current lifestyle could defeat evil itself.”¹⁷ The entertainment industry of the 1950s also produced *I Love Lucy* and important cultural figures like Marilyn Monroe and Hugh Hefner, all of whom relate to characters in *Damn Yankees*. *I Love Lucy* featured a domesticated Lucy Ricardo, who in each episode repeatedly tries to jump-start a successful career, only to fail miserably and be rescued by her husband and dismissed back into her domestic role as housekeeper.¹⁸ In *Damn Yankees*, Meg epitomizes the message *I Love Lucy* delivers to its viewers: the woman’s place is in the home. Likewise, Hugh Hefner played an important role in the culture of the 1950s, by starting the magazine *Playboy*, which featured nude photographs of Marilyn Monroe on the inaugural cover in 1953.¹⁹ Lola, Applegate’s sexual temptress, symbolizes the promiscuity that surrounded *Playboy* as she seduces Joe. Marilyn Monroe is the famous sexual temptress of the 1950s, and Lola shares her sexualized qualities. In the audience, tension had to result between the women and the men when Lola, scantily clad and sexually appealing, flaunts her beauty on stage to tempt Joe.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Sternfeld, Jessica. “Damn Yankees and the 1950s Man: You Gotta Have (Loyalty, and Escape Clause, and) Heart.” *Studies in Musical Theatre*. 3.1 (2009): p. 78.

¹⁸ Schaller, Michael, Virginia Scharff, and Robert. D. Schulzinger. *Coming of Age: American in the Twentieth Century*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

¹⁹ Ibid.

1950s culture was also filled with differing ideas of masculinity and success.²⁰ Societal expectations promoted the common man, who is responsible to his family and devoted to one woman. Yet, there was another side to American society in the 1950s: the promise of opportunity. Hefner showed men that their dreams, whether the dreams were living a “Playboy Lifestyle” or playing professional sports, were attainable. The resulting definition of masculinity in 1950s was ambiguous. One side valued loyalty, devotion and responsibility, while the other side valued heroism, promiscuity, and opportunity.²¹ *Damn Yankees* includes both versions of masculinity in the main character, Joe, and offers no definitive answer. The post-World War II era in America featured other forms of entertainment with similar situations found in *Damn Yankees*. Jessica Sternfeld cited cultural historian Martin Halliwell who noted that “many movies of the era portray a similar archetype, a man too domesticated, with too much time on his hands, feeling uncomfortable and trapped.”²² Joe becomes more relatable to the 1950s audience because he is in a familiar situation. Joe, like the 1950s man, has dreams of adventure and of an idealized life. But once Joe attains his dream, he realizes his real life was more desirable to his fictitious life.

The visuals in *Damn Yankees* featured 1950s culture as well. As Sternfeld explained, “The creative team behind *Damn Yankees* tapped into exactly these images: Joe Boyd the overly soft transforms into Joe Hardy the young, healthy hero. He goes from sitting passively on the couch to battling on the baseball field” signifying the message during the war effort: enlist to become a young, masculine hero. Sternfeld equated Joe Boyd and Joe

²⁰ Rotundo, Anthony, E. *American Manhood*. NY: Harper Collins Publishing, 1993

²¹ Ibid

²² Sternfeld, Jessica. “Damn Yankees and the 1950s Man: You Gotta Have (Loyalty, and Escape Clause, and) Heart.” P. 79.

Hardy to “the two sides of the 1950s American man.”²³ Boyd is the restless, post war veteran who lacks and seeks adventure, and Hardy is the young heroic masculine man, with a responsibility to his country, his team, his family, and his wife. *Damn Yankees* makes both versions of the “1950s American man” the same man, and illuminates the conflict between the two versions that society expected.

In addition to the definition of the 1950s man, a paramount issue in *Damn Yankees* is the role of women in society. Pre World War II, a woman’s place was the home, but World War II brought radical changes to the woman’s role in society.²⁴ Many women became doctors and nurses, teachers, factory workers, students at universities, and baseball players during World War II.²⁵ When the war was over and the soldiers returned, conflict between where women fit into society sprouted. One key element to the heroism of the war effort during the time was the home front, displayed by the iconic “Rosie the Riveter.”²⁶ Lola, Meg and Gloria symbolize “Rosie,” and all impact Joe’s life and decisions in the play. Lola is first, using sex to tempt and seduce Joe. Gloria is second, when she questions Joe’s background and investigates the truth as a journalist. Meg remains loyal to Joe throughout, even though it seems unlikely to her that Joe will return. Without Meg, Lola, and Gloria, Joe would not have been successful in becoming the man society needs him to be, just as America would not have won the war without the women on the home front.

One final cultural reference during the 1950s was the Red Scare epidemic pioneered by Senator Joseph McCarthy. While the world feared he spread of communism. McCarthy identified alleged communists, and those alleged were immediately black listed and

²³ Ibid, 81.

²⁴ Schaller, Michael. *Coming of Age: American in the Twentieth Century*.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

prevented from participating in society.²⁷ A similar “naming” and “labeling” occurs throughout *Damn Yankees*. From the opening scene of the play, Joe’s wife Meg poses questions about masculinity’s true nature and meaning. As Joe sits in front of the television and watches the Washington Senators lose another game, Meg complains that during the six months of the baseball season, it is like she does not have a husband. In this traditional setting, being a husband is part the role of being man, and Joe lacks that part for half of the year, as he dreams of his youth and of playing professional baseball. Then at the conclusion of *Damn Yankees*, both Meg and Joe sing that a woman is nothing without her man, and vice versa.

The definition of masculinity begins to take shape when Mr. Applegate enters the play in Act 1 Scene 2. The audience immediately is warned of Applegate’s sinister nature. According to the stage directions, Applegate “appears on the porch as if by magic,” and as he crosses his legs, “show[s] a pair of bright red socks,” which the audience recognizes as the color of the communism and Lucifer.²⁸ Theatre professor Jessica Sternfeld noted the sinister nature of Applegate and his “celebratory frenzy after recalling the deeds of Napoleon, Nero, the guillotine, Jack the Ripper, and the plagues,” noting that Applegate ended “on a reference to a fairly recent disaster, crowing, ‘Like the hopes that were dashed/When the stock market crashed/Ha ha ha ha/Those were the good old days.’”²⁹ However, when Joe asks who Applegate is, Applegate says he is a man. As Applegate is not a man in any sense of the physical connotation of the word, Applegate’s characterization of

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ As *Damn Yankees* is a rewrite of the story of Faustus, the audience would be undoubtedly looking for clues as to who the devil character would be.

²⁹ Sternfeld, Jessica. “Damn Yankees and the 1950s Man: You Gotta Have (Loyalty, and Escape Clause, and) Heart.” P. 77.

himself is ironic, yet accurate. Applegate shares the viewpoint of many men living in a patriarchal society: men live their life, and women stay home. Throughout the play, Applegate and Joe pair as obvious foils, but through each other the play's critique of society surfaces. The play features patriarchal characters who oppress the women in their life. Joe oppresses Meg, Applegate oppresses every woman in the play, and the rest of the ballplayers oppress Gloria. While the world of the play encourages this patriarchy, the play does not condone this sexist behavior, creating a schism for the audience to confront as the story unfolds.

As Applegate woos Joe into selling his soul for a chance to play baseball, Joe shows some buyer's remorse. Joe says, "Well—well—what do you want me to do . . . my job—my wife . . . I've got my wife to consider."³⁰ Applegate mentions that he hates wives, how they always get in the way of his work. As Joe progresses through the season and through the play, Joe's responsibilities as a man begin to take their toll, and the audience begins to see the difference between Joe and Applegate. Joe eventually cannot stand the thought of giving up on his wife and previous life, even if he gets to live his childhood dream. Early in Act 1 Joe shows his buyer's remorse on a more physical level by going to his house to visit Meg. Joe eventually becomes a tenant in his own home in order to be closer to Meg. Dramatic irony results because Meg does not recognize Joe as his size and shape have changed into that of the star baseball player, Joe Hardy. Applegate forbids Joe to visit Meg, and forbids Joe to feel these masculine emotions of duty and responsibility. During the early scenes with Meg and Joe, the gap between Applegate and Joe widens. The play stages the two of them as two men with a similar goal, but different means of achieving that goal. Applegate

³⁰ Adler, Richard. *Damn Yankees: A New Musical*. New York: Random House, 1956. p. 17-18.

refuses to lose, and attempts to win Joe's soul with fame, sex and money. Joe on the other hand, is conflicted. Joe has a responsibility to Meg, but also wants to live his dream. *Damn Yankees* juxtaposes these two different ideas of masculinity, and forces the audience to wrestle with the established society in which they live in. At the beginning of the play Joe seems to be willing to literally sell his soul for the chance play baseball. But Joe's journey proves that his responsibilities as a man outweigh his promiscuous desires. It is Joe's honor, duty and responsibility that make him a better man than Applegate.

Just in case Applegate's desire for Joe's soul was not already inherently clear to the audience, *Damn Yankees* features a sinister dialogue between Applegate and Lola when Lola enters the play.

APPLEGATE: Have a good trip?

LOLA: Perfect. The plan crashed in Cleveland.

APPLEGATE: Good, good. Now how about that job in Chicago?

LOLA: Cleared the whole thing up before I left. Got the old boy to embezzle \$100,000 and lost it for him at the racetrack. Then his wife left him and he took to drink. I told him I was through and he jumped out of the window. Twenty-second story.

APPLEGATE: That's high enough. That's fine.³¹

Despite Applegate's prowess, Joe, a common man, is able to overcome temptation from Applegate and from Lola as well as the contract because of the escape clause. Sternfeld observes another key conflict in the 1950s, "between safety and risk, staying at home and seeking adventure, passiveness and aggression"³² Seeking adventure, risk and aggression all correspond with the choice for Joe accepting Applegate's offer. Just as a baseball player takes the chance each at bat, Joe decides to take the chance, and hopes to make a complete trip around the bases, landing him back at home with Meg.

³¹ Adler, Richard. *Damn Yankees: A New Musical*. New York: Random House, 1956. p. 61-2

³² Sternfeld, Jessica. "Damn Yankees and the 1950s Man: You Gotta Have (Loyalty, and Escape Clause, and) Heart." P. 78.

New Yorker writer Alcott Gibbs felt that *Damn Yankee's* "deficiencies that kept it from being an unadulterated delight are, I should say, an inconsistency of style"³³ by which he meant the conflicting notions of masculinity. As an audience, receiving two opposing messages is unsettling. Gibbs states that the play lapses occasionally into a "doubtful taste," which makes some of the plot seem either too good to be true or unbelievable. Joe, the middle aged common man, gets to pursue his dream and play with the Senators, beating "those Damn Yankees," yet he also gets to cheat death and an eternity in hell. The play sets up a fun and happy ending, which is a double standard for the other issues the play brings forward, namely gender equality, responsibility and masculinity. American culture in the 1950s does not condone Joe's actions, creating a paradox between what society tells Joe to do, and the actions that Joe takes because of what society told him to do. The patriarchal society Joe lives in tells Joe that he should remain loyal to his family, but that he should also seek adventure. Normally a man would be forced to choose, but Joe gets to do both, creating a conflict for Joe and for the audience.

According to humanities professor Harry Elam Jr., one flaw of American society is the surge of conflict regarding American society's definition of itself. Elam says American society's identity has "never been a matter of concrete certainty. Rather each new age" is forced form and re-form itself, "construct[ing] around issues of difference."³⁴ (Elam 151) Because *Damn Yankees* is a play, the audience is forced to confront the conflicting messages the play is sending. Once Joe returns to his wife at the conclusion of the story, the audience begins to formulate questions of morality. The root of the conflict in *Damn Yankees* is

³³ Gibbs, Alcott. "Beezlebug Blanks Yanks." *The New Yorker* 14 May 1955: p. 132.

³⁴ Elam, Harry J. "'Only in America': Contemporary American Theatre and the Power of Performance." p. 151.

society against the individual. Society tells Joe to remain domesticated and loyal to his wife, but Joe, as an individual, desires more. Joe wants to chase his dream, experience adventure, and is sexually desired by temptresses like the ones Americans view in *Playboy* Magazine. *Damn Yankees* resolves the conflict ambiguously, because Joe experiences both versions of masculinity. He is both Joe Boyd and Joe Hardy.

However, Joe is influenced by the women of the play to the point that Joe's view of women lies on the cusp of equality. Joe's change of heart occurs in part because of Lola, who helps Joe exercise his escape clause and return Meg out of Lola's own love for Joe. At this point in the story, the definition of what it means to Joe to be a man is complete, while the definition of what it means to be a woman is cloudy. The play condones the "Lola version" of the woman because of her dominant role in the play and her sacrifice to Joe. Lola is "a real sexy baby," according to Applegate's description³⁵ with a "long, graceful line of her tanned neck . . . her eyes, [Joe] had to admit, were incredible. A deep lavender, with rich dark lashes looking as soft as a cashmere sweater."³⁶ Lola's talents and value revolve around her looks and sex appeal, an ideal molded by and geared toward men. Lola is the only female character whose feminine nature is described in a desirable way. Lola's patriarch is Applegate, and in the end she turns away from him and sacrifices herself for Joe's salvation. But Meg demands more sympathy from the audience than Lola because of Meg's loyalty to Joe throughout the play: a trait that the patriarchal society says is supposed to reflect masculinity. Gloria also demands respect from the audience because she proves that she does not need a man to survive, contrary to society's belief. Gloria

³⁵ Adler, Richard. *Damn Yankees: A New Musical*. New York: Random House, 1956. p. 76

³⁶ Wallop, Douglass. *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. New York: Norton and Company. 1954, p. 73-74.

unravels Joe's secret, and threatens Applegate's sadistic operation, and her only loyalty is to her individual career as a journalist. In song, Joe admits that "a man doesn't know what he has until he loses it, when a man has the love of a woman he abuses it . . ."³⁷ But Joe refers to the love of Meg, the loyal woman who maintains the house, and offers no insight into what "a man has" in regards to Lola or Gloria, leaving the audience twisted in ambiguity.

For Meg, a woman is nothing without her man, as *I Love Lucy* depicted on television in the 1950s. The play doesn't seem to condone the "Meg version" of the female as optimal, but her devotion is admirable, and in the play, she is the only one who remains loyal:

SISTER: Megsie, you might as well face it, Joe is never coming back.

MEG: I like to pretend he is.

SISTER: Well you got to go on living.

MEG: I am living.³⁸

Meg is visibly devastated by Joe's absence, even though she complained of his mental absence for half of the year in the opening song in Act 1, Meg struggles to live her life. Instead of "living" as her sister wants her to, Meg spends her time completing her usual duties while awaiting Joe's return. Gloria operates as a foil to Meg. Gloria needs no man in her life and does what Applegate would call "man's work." Gloria also impedes Applegate, which he views as threatening. Applegate's discomfort with Gloria is clear from his obvious misogynistic slur: "Go home. Get married. Have children."³⁹ Applegate believes in the patriarchal society where all women should behave like Meg, or at least do as they are told, as Lola does. Rather than succumbing to the patriarchal oppression from Applegate, Gloria

³⁷ Adler, Richard. *Damn Yankees: A New Musical*. New York: Random House, 1956. p. 56

³⁸ Ibid, 66.

³⁹ Ibid, 105.

uncovers the scandal that takes up the second half of the play, and is a major contributor to Joe's successful arbitration of his contract.

Act 1 scene 2 features an important dialogue between Gloria and the players from the Washington Senators. Gloria says the ballplayers are "very foolish to have this prejudice against me just because I'm a woman."⁴⁰ But the prejudice against Gloria goes further than the world of the play. Historically, allowing female reporters into the male locker rooms to conduct interviews after a game has been forbidden, and many reporters feel as Gloria feels, that women are not given equal opportunity if they are not allowed into locker rooms after a game. Gloria ironically and comically illustrates the other side of the argument after the Senators' manager asks why she is in attendance so early Gloria says she "came down to see the naked men,"⁴¹ which the players know is a joke. Regardless, the men openly display disdain. Most of the men feel she should not be allowed so closely to their "work lives," and should instead remain domesticated.

The climactic scene in the play occurs on the last game of the regular season, and features an upset Joe Hardy. Applegate appears to have tricked Joe into not exercising the escape clause and before the final game Joe realizes what it means to be a "man," and what kind of man he has become. But, with a flair for the dramatic, the play features Joe catching the winning pop fly and running off the field while he is falling out of his clothes as he changes back into Joe Boyd. The play shows Joe glance at Lola during the game. She nods at Joe, which he understands as confirmation that the escape clause is in effect, and Applegate

⁴⁰ Ibid, 30.

⁴¹ Ibid, 31.

is not in attendance.⁴² Wallop's book gives a clearer description of how Joe escapes Applegate. Lola says, "I mean you're free, Joe . . . yes, Joe, only I won't be free. I'll just be—ugly."⁴³ In a scene omitted from the play, Lola explains to Joe that she sacrificed herself for Joe's freedom, and Applegate transforms Lola back into the hideously ugly woman she was before she sold her soul to Applegate for eternal beauty. When Joe asks Lola why she sacrificed herself and her beauty, Lola explains, "I guess I loved a guy named Joe Hardy."⁴⁴ Joe struggles to leave Lola, who pleads with him to run away before Applegate transforms her.

JOE: I'm not sure I should go Lola. After all we've been through, after all you've done for me.

LOLA: You have a wife to return to, Joe

JOE: I know, but somehow I feel it's you I should be with. I feel ... maybe we should settle down ... a middle-aged couple . . .⁴⁵

Joe's expressed conflict mirrors his conflict throughout the story. Joe is forced to choose between two versions of society: the liberal side filled with opportunity, and the conservative side where safety is paramount. Likewise, the audience is forced to choose along with Joe. Lola does not allow Joe to shirk his duties to his wife, even though she loves Joe, and as Joe walks away, his transformation into a "man" is complete. This knowledge from Wallop's novel makes Lola out to be a hero of sorts, but the romantic moment sends an ambiguous message to the audience. It seems that a "proper" woman sacrifices herself

⁴² The Play substitutes the final scene in the book between Lola and Joe with this nod from afar. In prior scenes it is made clear that Applegate is going to prevent Joe from performing in the final game of the season, but Lola manages to get Applegate extra drunk, and he is apparently still drunk or hung-over at game time.

⁴³ Wallop, Douglass. *The Year the Yankees Lost the Pennant*. New York: Norton and Company. 1954, p. 236-7.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 237.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 240.

for men, so that a man can fulfill his commanding, domineering and oppressing societal role.

But Abbott leaves this romantic encounter out of *Damn Yankees*, instead having Joe run “off into the sunset.” In the musical, Lola still aids in Joe’s escape out of love, but without the explanatory scene after the game, Joe’s character seems incomplete. Joe returns to Meg in the final scene of the play, and they sing the concluding song about how they are not whole without each other. The extent of Lola’s sacrifice goes unnoticed, and without the scene between Lola and Joe, Joe’s transformation into “manhood” is unfinished and ambiguous. The play presents a flawed Joe, who signs a contract and sneaks his way out of it, leaves his wife for six months to follow his dream, deceives the people he encounters throughout the story, and returns to Meg afterward. However the audience also experiences Joe fall in love with Lola, the verbal oppression of Gloria from the players and from Applegate, and Joe’s unfair treatment of Meg. It seems that the play condones masculinity over femininity, adventure over compliance, and extraordinary heroism over common life. Reading *The Year the Yankees Lost The Pennant* with a careful eye uncovers the critiques of society that *Damn Yankees* offers the audience. Wallop includes strong feminine characters to contrast the patriarchy that dominates the play while on the surface, *Damn Yankees* places value in controlled patriarchy, where men are allowed to experience their dreams of heroism while their wives remain devoted and domesticated. But *Damn Yankees* is not just about Joe Boyd, nor is it just about baseball. *Damn Yankees* poses questions about masculinity and gender roles in a domesticated household and in the workplace; the same questions that were blossoming in American society during the 1950s. For Wallop and Abbott, there are two versions of the American man in the 1950s: Joe Boyd

and Joe Hardy, and *Damn Yankees* seems to prefer the “Joe Boyd version.” Abbott and Wallop also portray an image of the American woman in the 1950s; a loyal and devoted wife who only thinks of her husband’s and her family’s well being. Wallop and Abbott include Lola, Gloria, Meg, the rest of Joe’s teammates, and Applegate, all who exemplify different aspects of the American man and woman, to challenge the audience’s understanding of masculinity and femininity in the 1950s. While *Damn Yankees* is ambiguous in how society defines the male and female, Abbott and Wallop do define how society can improve. Everyone must be willing to undergo and help incite change, regardless of gender, class, race, or sexuality.

2nd Base:

Fences

August Wilson's *Fences* utilizes and critiques social issues in society just as *Damn Yankees* did. However, Wilson's play takes place contemporaneously to Civil Rights Movement. The play presents a generational gap between the main character, Troy, and Troy's son Cory, reflecting the same generational gap in African American culture. Wilson presents his play as a critique of the society of the 1950s and the racism that was rampant in American society, as well as the struggles African Americans faced. Mixed with all of Wilson's thematic material in his play is the game of baseball, specifically the many things "home plate" symbolizes for African Americans. Wilson also introduces some dark ideas about masculinity and what it means to be a "man." But for Wilson, there is no such thing as just a "man." There is either a "black man" or a "white man."

August Wilson wrote a series of ten plays which literary critics later refer to as the Pittsburgh Cycle, which take place in roughly each decade, starting with the turn of the twentieth century. Wilson said, "I was trying to focus on what I felt were the most important issues confronting black Americans for that decade, so ultimately they could stand as a record of black experience over the past hundred years presented in the form of dramatic literature."⁴⁶ Wilson noted how blacks have a tradition of passing history orally through tales or fables, and in turn Wilson discovered the usefulness of theatre to the black community. In addition, Wilson remarked how theatre has "as a way of politicizing the community and raising the consciousness of the people"⁴⁷ in a way that poetry or short fiction can not.

⁴⁶ August Wilson, Interview with Kim Bowers, in Bryer, Jackson R., and Mary C. Hartig, *Conversations With August Wilson*. (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006), p. 5.

⁴⁷ August Wilson, Interview with David Savran in Bryer, Jackson R., and Mary C. Hartig, *Conversations With August Wilson*. (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006), p. 21.

Fences premiered in 1987 at the 46th Street Theatre on Broadway, running for 525 performances. Wilson's play won the Tony Award for Best Play as well as the Pulitzer Prize for Best Drama in 1987. Play reviewer Edith Oliver of the *New Yorker* wrote that Troy, played by James Earl Jones, had a physical prowess over the other characters that represented Wilson's main character well. Oliver said, "there is no aspect of [Troy's] life in which he does not feel constricted," yet, "Troy dominates all—a rebellious, go-his-own-way, responsible, tough, smart, jovial, loving man, he seals his own doom . . . Jones brings every side of this complex man to light."⁴⁸

The play begins with Troy Maxon, a 53-year-old African-American garbage collector. Troy and his work-friend Bon are drinking on Friday, payday, when Troy's wife Rose and grown son Lyons enter the scene. Lyons asks for a ten-dollar loan and Rose convinces Troy to loan Lyons the money. Troy's other son, Cory, enters as Troy's rebellious teenager who is a sports star at his high school. Throughout the play, Cory and Troy argue over Cory's future as a football star. Troy believes Cory should not "waste his time" because white men will never allow him to play professionally. Cory believes that Troy is living in the past, and that change in society is mounting. Wilson creates a dichotomy between the older generation of African Americans, symbolized through Troy, and the younger generation of blacks, symbolized through Cory.

Throughout the play, Troy is constructing a fence surrounding his property. The play never explicitly states why Troy is building a fence, but the dialogue between the characters implies that Rose asked Troy to build it to keep her family safe at home, while Troy seems to be building it maintain control over his family. As the play progresses, the

⁴⁸ Oliver, Edith. "Mr. Wilson and Mr. Jones." *The New Yorker* 6 April 1987: p. 81

audience discovers that Troy has had an affair with another woman, Alberta, and fathered a daughter, Raynell. Alberta dies in childbirth, and Rose raises Raynell as her own, though Rosa informs Troy that he is now a “womanless man.” Cory discovers Troy’s infidelity, and challenges his dominance in their home. Troy kicks Cory out of the house and out of his yard, telling him to never return, and shortly afterward in the play Troy finishes the fence, and eventually dies. The final scene features all of Troy’s family and Bono at Troy’s funeral, all with careers and plans for the future.

The cultural significance of the time period Wilson set *Fences* reaches farther back than the 1950s. However, this time period marks the beginning in many ways of the slow progress made by the Civil Rights Movement. Jackie Robinson integrated professional baseball in 1947, sparking Harry Truman’s integration of the military in 1948. Shortly thereafter, the future leaders of the Civil Rights Movement rooted themselves in society. Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat in 1955, leading to the Montgomery Bus Boycott, where a young Martin Luther King Jr. led the African Americans into a minor yet inspiring victory toward equality for African Americans.⁴⁹ While the Supreme Court only outlawed segregation of public buses in the city of Montgomery, Alabama,⁵⁰ Martin Luther King Jr. earned national recognition and became significant non-violent leader of the Civil Rights Movement.⁵¹ Part of King’s strategy was to use children to create sympathy and to promote change, resulting in the “Little Rock Nine” integration of an elementary school in Little Rock, Alabama in 1957.⁵² President John F. Kennedy also publically addressed racial

⁴⁹ Schaller, Michael, Virginia Scharff, and Robert. D. Schulzinger. *Coming of Age: America in the Twentieth Century*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

⁵⁰ *Browder v. Gayle*, 352 U.S 903 (1956)

⁵¹ Schaller, *Coming of Age: America in the Twentieth Century*

⁵² Ibid.

segregation as a problem in American society, further instilling hope in African Americans.⁵³ Once Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Civil Rights Act of 1964⁵⁴ and Voting Rights Act of 1965⁵⁵, Martin Luther King Jr. helped to slowly induce public integration through sit-ins, boycotts, and other forms of non-violent protest. Malcom X, also a predominant leader of the Civil Rights Movement, instigated armed, defensive protests, and ultimately inspired the Black Power Movement beginning in 1959.⁵⁶ Wilson sets his play at the beginning of the resurgence of hope for African Americans during the 1950s, as well as a period with high levels of idealism for racial equality. In the Gettysburg Address in 1863, Abraham Lincoln asserted the importance of the “unfinished work”⁵⁷ that the dead soldiers of the civil war fought to begin. Despite the illegalization of slavery, Lincoln knew the journey to equality for African Americans would be an arduous one.⁵⁸ While African Americans were slowly being integrated into society during the late nineteenth century, the hope for equality was obliterated by the Jim Crow laws that resulted from the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision of 1896,⁵⁹ and did not resurface with prominence until the 1950s, the setting of Wilson’s play.

However, after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. in 1968, Malcom X in 1965, the Civil Rights Movement faltered because of the lack of a leader.⁶⁰ With the recession and energy crisis of the 1970s, the slashing of federal funding for housing

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ *Civil Rights Act of 1964* (Pub.L. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241)

⁵⁵ *Voting Rights Act of 1965* (42 U.S.C. 1973-1973bb-1)

⁵⁶ Schaller, Michael, *Coming of Age: America in the Twentieth Century*

⁵⁷ Lincoln, Abraham, in “The Gettysburg Address,”

<http://www.abrahamlincolnonline.org/lincoln/speeches/gettysburg.htm>

⁵⁸ Schaller, Michael, *Coming of Age: America in the Twentieth Century*

⁵⁹ *Plessy v. Ferguson*, 163 U.S. 537 (1896).

⁶⁰ Schaller, Michael, *Coming of Age: America in the Twentieth Century*

projects in the 1980s, and the massive tax breaks awarded to the rich through Ronald Reagan's presidency, African American's once again lost the mounting hope that Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X instilled in the 1950s and 1960s.⁶¹ For Wilson, writing *Fences* in 1987 while setting the play in the 1950s delivers two monumental backdrops for the events in the play and the subsequent messages that Wilson sends the audience.

Fences' undoubtedly impacted the African-American population in attendance through Troy's disillusionment and discontent with society. At a younger age, before time period of the play, Troy, living in poverty was forced to steal to support his family because of the lack of work. Once Troy finds a job as a garbage collector he is not allowed to drive. Wilson allows the audience to relate to Troy's hardship in the play as a black man. But *Fences* does not just critique the oppression of African Americans. It also critiques black society, and distinguishes and darkens the color line.

After Jackie Robinson's integration of baseball in 1947, assimilation became a crucial aspect of American society. However, in 1987 August Wilson argued that assimilation is detrimental to black culture when he said:

As African American's we should demand to participate in society as Africans ... the process of assimilation into white American society was a big mistake. We don't want to be like you. Blacks living in housing projects are isolated from society, for the most part—living as they choose, as Africans ... They've marked themselves as victims. Once they recognize that, they can begin to move through society in a different manner, from a stronger position, and claim what is theirs.⁶²

Troy claims what is his in a tangible way by building a fence around his property, and Troy views the fence as a way to protect himself from society. But Wilson also expresses the

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² August Wilson, interview with David Savran, in Bryer, Jackson R., and Mary C. Hartig, *Conversations With August Wilson*. (Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006), p. 31-2.

generational gap between Cory and Troy. Cory wants to explore and change the world, whereas Troy builds the fence, which protects but ostracizes Troy.

Fences also demonstrates a critical conflict between society and the individual. Troy's society tells him he is unequal to his white co-workers. He and Bono enter the play expressing their discontent toward their white boss. In the stage directions, Bono is described as a "follower" of Troy. In fact, everyone in the play, except Cory, turns out to be a follower of Troy in some way or another, and Troy's dominating presence grows and develops as the drama progresses. English professor Gunilla Kester noted Troy's inability "to overcome the historical reification of the black body. Bono and Troy are clearly exploited at a job where they are allowed to lift and carry trash, and not drive garbage trucks."⁶³ Troy as an individual stands up to racist society, and Bono is worried Troy will be fired because Troy confronted their boss about segregation at work. Troy believes he should be allowed to drive the garbage truck just as much as a white worker. However, throughout the play Troy is obsessed with reminding both the characters and the audience that they are "niggers" who are still considered inferior to whites. The repetition of the term "nigger" throughout the play holds a shock value for the 1980s audience, especially the white audience, because it forces them to confront their discomfort with the term, or with the black race, or with the black society as a whole. Wilson's frequent use of the term both reflects the society and unsettles it.

Troy identifies Bono as a "nigger" and Rose as a "woman," in the opening scene, and By categorizing the other characters in the play, Wilson shows the audience that Troy is the dominant male figure in the play. Troy even identifies himself as "boss" around his home

⁶³ Kester, Gunilla. "The Poetics of Memory and the Body in Two August Wilson Plays." *August Wilson: A Casebook*. NY: Garland Press, 2000. p. 110.

and says he does “the only saying that counts.”⁶⁴ Troy is not the boss at work, or in society, and he maintains his dominance at home however he can.

Troy’s life prior to the play is a different one, and as the play progresses, the audience understands the multiple reasons why Troy desires to dominate all aspects of his life. Troy’s father oppresses and abuses Troy at an early age resulting in Troy running away from home at fourteen. Troy is then forced to steal to support himself and eventually his family, which lands him in prison for fifteen years. Wilson informs the audience of Troy’s history slowly, thus creating a conflict of interest for the audience between Troy, the older generation, and Cory, the younger generation.

Troy’s life is suffocated by the racism of the past and present, to the point where he is unable to view his future with optimism. Wilson humanizes Troy in Troy’s retelling of his past more so than in any other passage in *Fences*. Before this moment, Troy is a dominating figure who is in, or at least feels like he is, control of every aspect of his life. For the audience, Troy is not a likable protagonist, but once Troy’s history is retold, the audience begins to sympathize with Troy, and understand his stubbornness and his need to identify himself,

As an individual, Troy wants racial equality, yet society prevents Troy, as well as every African American in the entire history of America, from being in complete control of his life. Part of Troy’s desire to be in control comes from when he was a young boy. Troy’s father attempted to rape Troy’s girlfriend, and he beat his father and ran away from home at the age of fourteen. Troy says, “Right there is where I become a man.” (Wilson 148) Troy’s sense of masculinity and of adulthood resulted from his rebellion against his father.

⁶⁴ Wilson, August. *Three Plays*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1991. p.135.

Literary critic Joan Fishman argued that while *Fences* “focus[es] on a black family molded and shaped by the forces of racism, Wilson offers a universal husband-wife and father-son conflict.”⁶⁵ She also noted Wilson’s exploration of “the internal pressuring forces which influence decisions of responsibility and the frequent inability of another person, even a family member, to understand the choice of a spouse or parent.”⁶⁶ Unable to understand his father, Troy rebels, just as Cory rebels against Troy, and just as Rose expresses disillusionment regarding Troy’s infidelity.

The audience quickly learns an integral difference between Cory and Troy regarding sports. Troy learns to play baseball in prison and society prevents him from playing professionally, while Cory is being recruited by a college football team, and is talented enough to play professionally. Troy is reluctant to allow Cory to play, and Troy’s experience with racism influences his reasoning. Troy says, “the white man ain’t gonna let him get nowhere with that football.”⁶⁷ But Rose interjects and opposes Troy’s inability to mold and change to the times, using Jackie Robinson as an example of a black man who played professional sports with whites. For Cory, football is the opportunity to break the poverty cycle that his family is living in. Troy believed baseball was his opportunity as a young man, but racism has given Troy a pessimistic outlook on the future for African Americans. Troy and Cory’s conflict over sports widens the gap between the generations. Troy’s other son, Lyons symbolizes the entrepreneurial African American, though he remains poor. When Lyons asks Troy for money, Troy vehemently tells Lyons to ask for a handout elsewhere and to get a job, but Lyons claims he “can’t find no decent job,” and chooses to identify

⁶⁵ Fishman, Joan. “Developing His Song: August Wilson’s *Fences*.” *August Wilson: A Casebook*. NY: Garland Press, 2000. 164.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Wilson, August. *Three Plays*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1991. p.111.

himself as a musician who will not stoop to his father's level and collect garbage. Though Troy has money and a home and a family, Lyon's and Cory seek a opportunity outside of the poverty cycle.

The opening of Act Two introduces Troy's infidelity. Bono calls him out on "laughing and joking with [Alberta] all the time," yet Troy dismisses Bono. Then later, Bono feels the need to inform Troy that his wife Rose is a good woman, but backs down when Troy confronts him. Early in the play, the other personalities who oppose Troy are weaker and subordinate. Later in the play, when the audience finds out that Bono's assumptions were correct and Troy has a child out of wedlock, Troy's reputation as the dominant patriarchal personality shifts, providing an opportunity for Cory to challenge Troy. As Jackie Robinson's wife Rachel Robinson alludes to in the Ken Burns documentary "Baseball," home is a retreat, a safe haven from everyone outside of the family. When Troy introduces a child out of wedlock to his home, he surrenders the security of the home life that is important to Rose, Cory, and all African Americans. Rachel Robinson also offers insight as to why fencing in Troy's home is so important to Troy. She says:

At the funeral, Jessie Jackson did the eulogy, and he said Jackie Robinson stole home, and he's safe. And that, even now, is very important to me. Giamatti said it best, you make the trip around the bases and somehow you land at home, and home has so many meanings, and so many meanings for people like us who for whom family and home were the central basis of our operation. I mean we were family people, we were people who always had a home, and we always could come home and it was a retreat from a world that can lay a lot of heavy things on you, so I carried that blow-up from room for weeks because looking at it, I knew he was safe. Nobody could hurt him again, he wouldn't hear the name calling, only the cheers, and somehow I could fantasize my own little story about where he was and how he was doing, and let him rest in peace.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Rachel Robinson, in Ken Burns' Documentary "Baseball"

Troy felt like he was stuck on first base, unable to return “home.” But, while trying to return home Troy committed adultery, and destroyed his home.

Before Cory stands up to Troy, Rose challenges Troy when Troy informs her that he is going the father of a child with another woman. Troy explains himself in a baseball metaphor. Troy says,

When I found you and Cory and a halfway decent job ... I was safe. Couldn't nothing touch me. I wasn't gonna strike out no more. I wasn't going back to the penitentiary. I wasn't gonna lay in the streets with a bottle of wine. I was safe. I had me a family. A job I wasn't gonna get that last strike. I was on first looking for one of them boys to knock me in. To get me home. (Wilson 164)

But, Troy says after eighteen years of standing on first base, he wanted to steal second, to advance in his life and in society. In the midst of Troy's troubled past, he learns to play baseball in prison. Symbolically, prison became “home” for Troy, and the fences that caged Troy for fifteen years became more than just the prison bars. The prison bars also symbolize the fence that Troy builds, in attempt to recreate the safety of home that prison provided.

However, the way Troy bought his home introduces controversy for the audience. Despite Troy's assertion that Lyon's should get a job instead of asking for a loan, Troy “borrows” the money to buy the house from his brother Gabriel. Literary critic Eric Sterling's essay notes a familial flaw in Troy's character regarding Gabriel. Sterling notes how Troy bought the house from government compensation money given to Gabriel after an injury he suffered during World War II. Therefore the true owner of Troy's home is cloudy, and the sense of home that Rose tries desperately to create and preserve dampens when the audience discovers that Troy has used Gabriel's disability to Troy's advantage. Gabriel's name references the angel from the bible, furthering the cultural significance to

religion for African Americans as well as deepening the controversy of Troy's decision. Sterling writes, "Troy takes credit for the purchase of his house because he feels the need to compensate for his low social position by manifesting his worth." (53) Troy is a product of his society, and feels the need to provide to his wife and his family, and protect it. Racist society has prevented him from providing for his family adequately, so Troy steals from his disabled brother. Wilson offers that the race to assimilate African Americans into white, capitalist culture explains Troy's ethically questionable decision.

The most significant symbol in *Fences* is the tangible fence that Troy is building throughout the play. In Act One Scene Three, Troy is working on building a fence around his yard, and asks Cory for help. But Cory is reluctant to help Troy, because Cory represents the younger generation. Cory does not want to remain safe at "home," instead he wants to live equal to whites. But Troy does not finish building fence until late in the play, just before he dies. In Troy's life, outside the fence represented the oppressive white society, and inside the fence represented the "retreat," as Rachel Robinson said, "from a world that can lay a lot of heavy things on you." The fence also represents the conflict between the younger generation and the older generation in African American culture. The younger generation wants to tear down the metaphoric fence, and change society, while the older generation wants to fortify the home, and protect what little they are allowed to have. But, the fence is also an obstacle in Troy's life, and the link between the past and the future. For Troy, the openness of the future is outside the fence, and his life and his past is caged inside. Troy's inability to figuratively see past his fence leads Cory away from Troy.

Theatre critic Eric Sterling claimed Troy's fence represents the fence that encompasses the baseball field, and "the symbolic boundary defining his social power."⁶⁹ Despite Troy's desire to build a fence and keep danger out, Troy breaks boundaries, or fences, outside of his home. Troy breaks the color barrier at work as the first black garbage truck driver in the city, and Troy breaks his family apart.

Troy not only protects Rose and provides for the family, but he also controls her. Literary critic Yvonne Iden Ngwa asserted that Rose is the ideal wife. She supplies Troy with Cory, with meals and a well-kept house, and with stability "that Troy enjoys [and] prompts him to appreciate his wife. Grateful and content, he is faithful and devoted to her for the first eighteen years of marriage. It is consequently not surprising that Rose desires to preserve the unity of the family that they have succeeded in founding."⁷⁰ However, Troy commits adultery, pushing Rose's power higher than anticipated and thus in direct contrast to Troy's patriarchal power. To Rose, the fence signifies keeping her family home; for Troy it is the exact opposite: to keep people out. But, Troy's fence is not the only fence in *Fences*. Troy builds a fence of his own between him and the rest of his family because of his lover, Alberta. Ngwa notes that "at the climax of the play when Rose is shocked by the news of Troy's infidelity, she quickly recovers and seeks a way forward by asking Troy whether he is ready to give up the relationship with Alberta. It is Troy's refusal to give up that relationship that creates a rift between these two."⁷¹ Alberta signifies the chance for a better life, one that Troy wants for Cory. Despite the importance of family and the home,

⁶⁹ Sterling, Eric. "Protecting Home: Patriarchal authority in August Wilson's *Fences*." *Essays in Theatre* 17 November 1998. p.59

⁷⁰ Ngwa, Yvonne. "Unfencing the Fence: The Wife as Mediator in August Wilson's *Fences*." *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies* 4.2 (2013): p. 74.

⁷¹ Ibid

Troy cannot sacrifice his only promise for the future. But, Alberta dies in childbirth, shattering Troy's hope, and sending a dark message to the older generation in the audience, namely that hope lies solely with the younger generation. After the audience learns about Troy's infidelity, and after Alberta dies during childbirth, Troy visibly loses his own identity of himself little by little. Wilson concludes scene two with a soliloquy, where the stage direction says that Troy delivers the lines "with a quiet rage that threatens to consume him."⁷² Where once Troy was in control of his life and asserted his dominance over the other characters in the play, at this point the opposite is true.

Act 2 scene 4 features the pinnacle of the growing tension between Cory and Troy. When Cory confronts Troy about football and about Raynell, a brawl ensues. Cory grabs Troy's old baseball bat to use as a weapon, but after two swings and two misses, Cory backs down. Perhaps Cory is literally afraid to swing and miss a third time, thus striking out. But also, Cory views himself as superior, and is unable to injure Troy. Likewise, after Troy disarms his son, he throws Cory out of the house. Symbolically, Cory has broken away from the older generation. But Cory has also left "home," and must face the racist society. After the brawl, Troy leaves Cory's possessions over the other side of the fence, signifying Cory's passage into the future and into a better life. Troy remains behind, sticking to his past, and dying with it. The next scene begins with Troy's funeral years later, where Troy's whole family has returned home. Now 7 years old, Raynell meets Cory, and the moment is awkward at first, as Raynell is a living and walking reminder of Troy's infidelity. But Cory and Raynell recognize their kinship, and bond over a song about their father, a song signifying that things are changing for African Americans. Here again, the younger

⁷² Wilson, August. *Three Plays*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1991. p.170.

generation looks to the future in song, while the older generation remains in the past.

Wilson sends the message to the audience of *Fences* that the younger generation of African Americans is the group that will promote change.

While Cory and Raynell symbolize the promise for the future, Rose symbolizes the importance of the culture. As literary critic Yvonne Ngwa argued, Wilson excludes Troy from only one scene: the final scene, which is Troy's funeral. Ngwa wrote, "Despite the fact that Troy is Wilson's hero in this play, the fact that his death is not staged but is just reported can entail that he is not very much prized [sic]. He is eclipsed by Rose . . . equally vital is the fact that Bono, Lyons, Cory, Raynell, and even the insane Gabe . . . all gather around her . . . the family can now remain united around Rose in the enclosure of the fence that surrounds their yard."⁷³ Literary critic Joan Fishman's agreed with Ngwa, writing, "as Wilson makes Rose smarter and her suffering greater, our empathy for her is stronger."⁷⁴ It is Rose, not Troy, who "stands in the center of the play as a model of responsibility but also an example of the cost of responsibility to others at the expense of self."⁷⁵ Rose is the person who requests that Troy build the fence to keep the family safe at home as well as raises Raynell despite the conflict surrounding the situation. She symbolizes the reminder to the younger generation that African American culture is important to retain. August Wilson noted in an interview how at the conclusion of *Fences*, "Rose is in a church." The symbolism of religion in black culture is paramount, and the rest of Rose's family surrounds her in the home. Wilson sends the message to the younger generation of the

⁷³ Ngwa, Yvonne. "Unfencing the Fence: The Wife as Mediator in August Wilson's *Fences*." *Labyrinth: An International Refereed Journal of Postmodern Studies* 4.2 (2013): p. 76.

⁷⁴ Fishman, Joan. "Developing His Song: August Wilson's *Fences*." *August Wilson: A Casebook*. NY: Garland Press, 2000. 174.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

1980s and the older generation of the 1950s that while pushing for social change is necessary, it is also crucial to retain the past, an integral part of the African American identity.

Fences critiques the roles of women and men in the household, questions the established racism of society, critiques the dichotomy of black and white in the workplace, and it critiques the roles of women and men in the household. Apart from the symbolism of the fence, home plate, and of Troy's old baseball bat, America's pastime is more of a metaphor for Troy to explain himself. Troy tells old stories of playing baseball in prison and of playing with Jackie Robinson in the Negro Leagues. These stories undoubtedly triggered an emotional reaction for the audience, and the nature of Troy's relationship to baseball symbolizes the relationship that everyone had to baseball during Jackie Robinson's rookie year in 1947. August Wilson said, "[b]lack people do not have a history of writing—things in Africa were passed on orally."⁷⁶ Wilson stresses the importance of maintaining the African culture in white America, and Wilson's protagonist, Troy, embodies this link to the past, while Troy's son and daughter embody the hope for the future.

Don Gagnon, an independent play critic, opined, "drama should stir an audience. Wilson himself said 'art changes individuals; individuals change society.' Shouldn't people be moved? Shouldn't we be lifted out of our seats, out of our lives, out of our comfort zones by an artistic rendering of life so charged that to sit still is simply impossible?"⁷⁷ Similarly, baseball has this effect on an audience: to "stir an audience . . . [to be] lifted out of our seats,

⁷⁶ August Wilson, interview with David Savran, in Bryer, Jackson R. *Conversations With August Wilson*. Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006. p. 26.

⁷⁷ Gagnon, Don. "Denzel Washington and Company Gun Through *Fences*." *Black Renaissance Noire*. p. 2.

out of our lives, out of our comfort zones . . .” Wilson articulates Gagnon’s assertion that the production of a play should do more than entertain. It should stir emotions, inspire or challenge established norms, and promote positive change. According to Wilson the message that drama can send is perhaps, not reaching enough people to succeed. Wilson said,

Theatre engages very few people. I don’t think it has to be that way. I think it should be a part of everyone’s life, the way television is. But it’s not. It’s moving the other way. As it costs more and more to produce plays, you see fewer and fewer. Fewer playwrights are given the opportunity to fail. You can learn immeasurably from a failure. You should at least be given the opportunity to bat—if you strike out, you strike out. The cost of production, the price of tickets, all of these things further remove theatre from the people and make it an elitist art form, which I think is wrong. But I don’t know how to correct it . . . If you’re giving the audience the same thing they are getting on TV, there’s no reason for them to come to the theatre.⁷⁸

Fences delivers a different experience than the audience receives from the television, and when the audience engages in the issues introduced by *Fences* into their own lives, or in society as a whole, that very society has a chance to reform.

⁷⁸ August Wilson, in an interview with David Savran, in Bryer, Jackson R. *Conversations With August Wilson*. Mississippi: University of Mississippi, 2006. p. 35-6.

3rd Base:

Take Me Out

Richard Greenberg offers a critical interpretation of society during the turn of the twenty-first century through baseball in his play *Take Me Out*. A common theme between the three plays is the concept of masculinity both in baseball and in society, and *Take Me Out* focuses on the definition of sexual identity. However, Greenberg's play is not a gay-pride celebration that promotes same-sex marriage or equality for gay people. Instead *Take Me Out* pressures the established societal taboo placed on homosexuality, questions the validity of such taboos, and forces the audience to come to terms with homosexuality via full frontal male nudity.

A gay playwright Richard Greenberg wrote *Take Me Out* during a critical political revolution for same-sex marriage. Premiering in 2002 in London, *Take Me Out* opened just months after the Netherlands became the first country to legalize and recognize same-sex marriages.⁷⁹ Greenberg, an American playwright, had already written multiple plays before *Take Me Out*, but *Take Me Out* was the first play that he premiered internationally, perhaps because of the recent legalization of same-sex marriage. Greenberg's play then premiered in the United States in February of 2003, and four months later, the United States rendered unconstitutional the legal ban on consensual gay sex through the court case *Lawrence V. Texas*.⁸⁰ But, with efforts in opposition to gay equality, society's acceptance of homosexuality grew. In 1969, the Stonewall Riots in New York City marked one of the first influential expressions of gay pride. Soon thereafter, in 1973, the American Psychiatric Association stated homosexuality was not an illness, and five years later Harvey Milk

⁷⁹ Roberts, Sam. "Gay Marriage Gets a Dutch Boost." *New York Times: City Room Blog* 25 June 2009

⁸⁰ *Lawrence v. Texas*, 539. U.S. 558 (2003)

became the first openly gay man to hold public office.⁸¹ However, three years later Exodus International began as a non-profit organization, in 1976. Exodus argued that homosexuality conflicted with morality established in the bible, and even attempted to repress homosexual desire and convert homosexuals to heterosexual.⁸²

For professional sports, homosexuality remained an unstated taboo, as Glenn Burke and Billy Beane are the only openly gay baseball players in history. But both Burke and Beane came out after their careers had concluded, and at the time of Greenberg's play, no player had ever come out during their career. During the 1990s and 2000s, American society showed greater public acceptance of open homosexuality, while preventing acknowledgement of homosexual identity. For example, Bill Clinton installed the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in 1993 that prevented gay people from self-identifying. As scholar Shane Grant argued in his dissertation, the military policy stemmed in an attempt to protect "the vulnerability of straight soldiers to homosexual attack in public showers."⁸³ Grant points out "the ridiculousness of this fear," but in straight society, homophobia birthed gay inequality. Athletics is another institution that promotes hyper masculinity, and makes a concerted effort to not acknowledge homosexuality, and Greenberg's play features the first ever active baseball player to come out during a season and the potential consequences that resulted.

Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out*, which won the 2003 Tony Award for Best Play, premiered as one of the few plays to ever feature completely nude men on stage. Theatre

⁸¹ Schaller, Michael, Virginia Scharff, and Robert. D. Schulzinger. *Coming of Age: American in the Twentieth Century*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Grant, M Shane. "Under the Rainbow: Post-Closet Gay Male Representation in American Theatre and Television." Diss. Florida State U, 2011. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A. The Humanities and Social Sciences* 71.8 (2011): p. 41.

critic Allen Ellenzweig commented on the “buzz concerned” with the Broadway play’s “lavish display of male nudity.”⁸⁴ Once *Take Me Out* moved from the Britain play circuit to Broadway, Ellenzweig wrote that although director Joe Mantello, who is also gay, and Greenberg adjusted the play to “a two-act instead of a three-act version . . . I can assure interested parties that a chorus line of well-built men taking a shower on stage will not hurt its commercial fortunes.”⁸⁵ Theatre critic Robert Brustein also commented on the two frontal nude shower scenes with actual running water. Brustein commented that “the audience gets plenty of opportunity to compare a large variety of wet male members ranging from modest to mammoth. When a player drops a bar of soap, the tension in the steamy air is palpable.”⁸⁶ Brustein concluded that the play views baseball “through gay binoculars by a playwright devoted both to extolling baseball and to subverting its conventional notions of masculinity.”⁸⁷ The frontal male nudity in *Take Me Out* proves more than just an excuse for penis-loving audience members to “compare a large variety of wet male members ranging from modest to mammoth” as Brustein put it. It also forces the unsuspecting audience member to overcome potential homophobia, and any suppressed anxiety or discomfort they may feel upon the sight of a penis. Greenberg was likely suggesting that society can’t hide from homosexuality forever, and in *Take Me Out*, the audience literally cannot avoid seeing nude men.

Take Me Out begins with Kippy Sunderstrom, the play’s interpreter and narrator of events, alone on stage. Kippy retells the audience about the season where Darren Lemming,

⁸⁴ Ellenzweig, Allen. “It Takes a Jock.” *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 10.3. May/June 2003. p. 50

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Brustein, Robert. “On Theater Creations.” *New Republic* 288.11. 24 March 2003. p. 26

⁸⁷ Ibid.

the team's star player, unexpectedly announced to the public that he is gay. Different players from the Empires, Darren and Kippy's baseball team, interact with Darren about his open homosexuality. The catcher, Jason, is the first, and Jason implies that Darren's sexuality won't be a big issue, saying the ancient Greeks had homosexuals amongst them and built the pyramids. Jason is wrong in both cases. Once Kippy and Darren are alone on stage again, Kippy remarks that "there's gonna be a lotta shit like that."⁸⁸ The scene then changes to the locker room into which Darren enters and finds Toddy, another player, already naked after a shower. Darren and Toddy interact about how uncomfortable Toddy feels when he is naked within Darren's view. Darren says his sexuality is not anyone's problem, a stance he takes throughout the play. However, Darren's homosexuality becomes his teammates' problem as the play continues.

Greenberg then introduces Shane Mungitt, a minor league star pitcher whom the Empires promote to the professional team, and Davey Battle, Darren's best friend and star baseball player for a rival team. Davey is arguably the reason Darren decides to announce his homosexuality to the public, but as the play unravels Davey expresses hypocritical homophobia. On the other hand, Shane is the play's most uneducated and racist character and the Commissioner of Baseball suspends Shane after saying "I don't mind the colored people—the gooks an' the spics an' the coons an' like that. But *every night* t'hafta take a shower with a *faggot*?"⁸⁹ in an interview on live television. As the play progresses, other players on the team interact and wrestle with the different aspects of homosexuality in the locker room, but Darren remains steadfast and seemingly unaffected by his teammates negative reaction to his sexuality. By the end of Act Two, the Empires play a season game

⁸⁸ Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 16.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 45.

against Davey's team, and Shane, who is reinstated by the commissioner, kills Davey with a fastball to the head.

In Act three Darren begins to show signs of agitation from the negative response he receives from the Empires and he questions if he ever had any true friends who were straight, or if he ever will again. As the play concludes, Darren and Kippy talk to Shane in order to attempt to understand why Shane killed Davey, and Shane admits that he overheard Davey and Darren saying hateful things to each other, and Shane thought killing Davey was what Darren wanted.

In addition to being gay, Darren is of mixed racial background, a distinction Allen Ellenzweig noted in his review. *Take Me Out* does not revolve around homosexuality entirely, or even exclusively, as Ellenzweig explained, "*Take Me Out* does better at bringing into view the fault lines of race and class in team sports,"⁹⁰ and Darren's multi-racial background introduces racial implications to the foreground of the play. Ellenzweig asserted that Greenberg "has not prepared us sufficiently for this theme [referring to Darren's race and sexuality] although he drops hints throughout *Take Me Out* that his protagonist's race has never been a problem for him. For certainly to be black and gay demands of a young man a reckoning with his own heart and his twin communities"⁹¹ which Darren struggles with throughout *Take Me Out*. Ellenzweig was accurate in his claim that Greenberg does not prepare the audience for the multi-racial elements in *Take Me Out*. The team's obsession with Darren is rooted in homosexuality, not Darren's bi-racial background, which is revealed in the beginning of the play as a side note to Darren's

⁹⁰ Ellenzweig, Allen. "It Takes a Jock." *Gay and Lesbian Review Worldwide* 10.3. May/June 2003. p. 50

⁹¹ Ibid.

homosexuality. But, by not focusing on Darren's bi-racial background, the audience views Darren as gay, and the rest of the characters as straight, and race fades from view. In this way, the audience, who may not be able to deal with racial identities in society, does not pay attention to Darren's genealogy. Greenberg might be hinting that society, which historically has made a concerted effort to not acknowledge racial identity, is more unwilling to accept homosexuality.

Baseball is integral to Darren's struggle, as the play spans the length of a season. Literary critic Peter Carino asserted that *Take Me Out* "challenges baseball's claims to mirror democracy by exposing the hegemonic norm of heterosexuality, on which this claim depends . . . For a long time, MLB representatives, commentators, and fans have portrayed the game as a metaphor for American ideals, promoting it as a model of fair play and diversity, welcoming all on equal terms and judging each on his performance on the field."⁹² The message Greenberg's play sends is that baseball is not the metaphor for positive American ideals, but rather the negative, homophobic, racist, and sexist ideals. *New Yorker* critic John Lahr suggested that "baseball brings together on one bright pastoral greensward those twin nineteenth-century American deliriums: industrialization and individualism. Baseball turns into fun the oppressions of industry—management, productivity, accounting, specialization, even stealing."⁹³ But those "twin nineteenth-century American deliriums" were still segregated, as society overshadowed individualism and prevented diversity of sexual identity. Lahr believed that baseball is "a game of hope. Part of that hope lies in the clarity of the sport—a kind of mathematical absoluteness that

⁹² Carino, Peter. "Language and the construction of masculinity in Richard Greenberg's *Take Me Out*." *Baseball/literature/culture* 1 Januray 2008: p. 85.

⁹³ Lahr, John. "Play at the Plate: Losing it in the locker room." *The New Yorker* 22 July 2002: p. 80.

spills over into moral absoluteness, and explains why the fantasy of all-American wholesomeness goes with the game like sauerkraut with hot dogs.”⁹⁴ Again, this “fantasy of all-American wholesomeness” is entirely hyper masculine, leaving Darren with the notion that his homosexuality somehow disrupts the wholesomeness of baseball.

Lahr quoted academic Germaine Greer’s assertion that “that no player would be called up from the minors to help a defending team win a championship; and that Greenberg was misguided in depicting the team’s catcher—who is, after all, the anchor of the game—as a malapropprone [sic] ignoramus with as much brain power as a radish.”⁹⁵ For Greer, Shane and Jason are too uneducated to play professional baseball. But professional sports do not support education as much as they support success, and Jason and Shane help the Empires win. In addition, racism and bigotry was a reality in professional baseball with Atlanta Braves relief pitcher John Roker, who parallels Shane in *Take Me Out*. Roker’s outward racism is best exemplified when he said, “You are a low-class, ignorant piece of scum who doesn’t care about anything or anybody. You are a Neanderthal. Maybe this season Mike Piazza or any other Mets player will hit you in the head with a line drive.”⁹⁶ Lahr wrote that *Take Me Out* accurately and truthfully depicted the game of baseball while at the same time attempting to “marry ‘the old ballgame’ with what you could call ‘the new ballgame’: gay politics.”⁹⁷ However, for Greenberg, part of the stigma surrounding baseball is this notion of the “old ballgame,” and its reluctance to change into “the new ballgame” that does not stigmatize homosexuality.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Pearlman, Jeff. “At Full Blast.” *Sports Illustrated* 23 December 1999: Web.

⁹⁷ Lahr, John. “Play at the Plate: Losing it in the locker room.” p. 80.

Later in his review, Lahr commented how Darren, “finds himself suddenly turned from an object of envy to an object of pity” after announcing his homosexuality. Lahr wrote, “what Greenberg’s story suggests is that by coming out you risk letting in the unknown, both good and bad.”⁹⁸ Part of the bad is Davey’s death, resulting from homophobic conflict between Darren and every straight man in the play, but other negative outcomes include Darren’s “cooling of his friendship with Kippy” and “Mungitt’s banishment from baseball.” Despite the negative events in the story, Greenberg includes positive moments for other gay characters in the play, namely Mason, Darren’s accountant. Mason thanks Darren, a famous baseball star, for making a gay-pride statement for the public of an anti-gay society. In recent history, entertainers and journalist Ellen DeGeneres, Neil Patrick Harris, Anderson Cooper, Elton John, and Lady Gaga have promoted open homosexuality, and proven to be inspiration for closeted and repressed gay people in American society. Perhaps the most influential public figure for gay awareness was Pedro Zumora, the first openly gay man with AIDS to star in a television series, “The Real World: San Francisco” in 1994.⁹⁹

But, the entertainment and journalism industries do not include potential nude situations in a communal shower the way athletics does, which might explain why fewer athletes seem willing to announce their homosexuality publically. Two baseball players have come out, Billy Beane and Glenn Burke, however, no baseball player has ever come out during their career. As Ellen DeGeneres or Elton John symbolize the theatrical entertainment world, athletics symbolize the hyper masculine world of American society,

⁹⁸ Ibid., 81.

⁹⁹ Schaller, Michael, Virginia Scharff, and Robert. D. Schulzinger. *Coming of Age: American in the Twentieth Century*. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

and homosexuality and hyper masculinity oppose one another. The physicality of sports like baseball require athletes to attain a higher degree of muscularity, which prompts perceptions of hyper masculinity. But Greenberg contrasts the traditional notion of masculinity in sports with Darren, who is physically superior to the other characters in the play, but also gay, which counters the stereotype that all homosexual men are effeminate. Greenberg takes the critique of masculinity in the sports realm one step further with the title of his play, as theatre critic David Kaufman noted how the title “Take Me Out” refers to “a familiar baseball song, to coming out of the closet and to a climactic beanball [sic] murder.”¹⁰⁰ Greenberg ultimately draws parallels between America’s pastime with coming out of the closet, and through his play, critiques the hyper-masculinity that surrounds the sport.

Kaufman also argued an opposing point in his review, that “an openly gay playwright like Greenberg no longer feels the need to paint an exclusively favorable portrait of a gay protagonist like Darren.”¹⁰¹ Instead, Darren is arrogant and bombastic because he is the best player in baseball, and Darren does not assume his sexuality will have an effect on the rest of the team. Part of Greenberg’s critique, as Kaufman implied, is why Darren’s sexuality has any effect on the rest of the team at all. Kaufman quoted essayist and critic Bert Archer, who argued, “American society has transcended the binary nature of sexuality, and crossed to the other side of a gender-fractured world.”¹⁰² Darren himself does not transcend the binary nature of sexuality. Instead Darren muddles the

¹⁰⁰ Kaufman, David, rev. “Playing the Field.” *Nation* 277.1. 7 July 2003. p. 30.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 31

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

dichotomies that American society has created, namely black and white, homosexual and heterosexual, and male and female.

With the intermixing of established dualities in *Take Me Out*, Greenberg supplies an interpreter and translator for the audience, Kippy. While *Take Me Out* confronts society's traditional anti-gay values, Kippy relates to the audience by breaking the "fourth wall," meaning Kippy pauses the events of the play to directly communicate to the audience. But, Kippy often fails to rationalize the events of the story. At the opening of the play, Kippy attempts to explain to the audience when the story began, but cannot. In this way, the play acts as if that the fictitious events of the story actually happened. Rather than letting the events unfold in order, Greenberg has Kippy tell the events out of order, maintaining tension for the audience, but also giving the illusion that the story is true.

Greenberg makes Darren's sexuality clear from Darren's opening dialogue, when he says, "I don't want to fuck any of you."¹⁰³ Kippy, for the most part, is unbiased throughout the play, which allows Darren to speak openly to him at the beginning. However, after Darren's line, Kippy responds unexpectedly: "It's not about that Darren." Just left as that response, a sense of acceptance is instilled in this opening scene. Moreover, Kippy responds it up with *the* line that plants the homophobic idea in the audience's head. Kippy says, "It's about *us* wanting to fuck you."¹⁰⁴ Regardless of the sexual orientation of the members of the audience, Kippy's response demands contemplation, and delivers a critique of the hyper masculine nature of sports in American society at the outset. Just as the audience is forced to confront any discomfort from live full frontal male nudity on stage, the members of the

¹⁰³ Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 8.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

Empires are forced to confront their own fears of homosexuals, and their own fear that they themselves have closeted homosexual desires.

Feminist and Gender Studies professor Donna Drucker articulated Alfred Kinsey's research regarding male sexuality, namely Kinsey's 0-6 scale. Drucker wrote, "Alfred Kinsey demonstrated that the complexity of human sexuality could best be represented on a continuum rather than as a binary . . . A primary intention of the scale was to eradicate sexual identity caterogies altogether in order to eliminate sexual identity-based persecutions and to promote equal rights."¹⁰⁵ Based after studying thousands of men and women, Kinsey discovered that in regards to sexual desire and erotic experience, men and women are neither completely heterosexual or homosexual, but mixture of the two. In this sense, sexuality is fluid. With Kinsey's scale in mind, Kippy's reply, "It's about *us* wanting to fuck you," suggests that even before Darren comes out, the other players in the locker room found him attractive, if not sexually desirable. Because the locker room is a hyper masculine zone, the possibility for Toddy, Jason, Kippy, or any of the Empires' thoughts and potential homosexual desires to actualize is miniscule. However, once Darren announces that he is gay, the player's sexual desires turn from hypothetical to possible, and the resulting reactions are overt repression and denial.

For example, When Darren enters the first shower scene, Greenberg creates a schism between Darren's view of his sexuality and everyone else's view of Darren's sexuality. Prior to Darren coming out, as Shane Grant argued, what was once a seemingly innocuous, asexual shower situation among the team has become a "hotbed of sexual

¹⁰⁵ Drucker, Donna J. "Male Sexuality and Alfred Kinsey's 0-6 Scale: Toward 'A Sound Understanding of the Realities of Sex.'" *Journal of Homosexuality*. 2010: p. 1105.

tension.”¹⁰⁶ Toddy’s reaction to being naked in front of Darren is hostile, and Toddy shows his self-consciousness regarding homosexuality.

DARREN: (*casually*) Hey.

TODDY: Okay, so now I gotta be worrying about this?

DARREN: About what is that, Toddy?

TODDY: So now I gotta start worrying that every time I’m naked or dressed or whatever, you’re checking out my ass.

DARREN: I’m not facing your ass at the moment, Toddy.

TODDY: Like *that*. Not just skeevious glances—I gotta put up with lewd remarks.

DARREN: That wasn’t lewd, Toddy.

TODDY: You’re not *getting* me man. Why do I have to go around this room, which is, has been, which is this sanc-chewy, rackled with self-consciousness about my body?

DARREN: Are you rackled Toddy?

TODDY: I am, I am *rackled* man.¹⁰⁷

Toddy expresses homophobia without initiation from Darren, especially later after Darren’s says, “you know, nudity’s not *required* here, Toddy.”¹⁰⁸ Instead of holding an educated conversation with Darren, Toddy instead blurts his religious defense against homosexuality, saying “God doesn’t agree” and “God can kill ya, man,” two statements that circumvent the issue of males showering in locker rooms. Grant points out how “Toddy’s reaction resembles much of the argument against open service, particularly of gay men, in the military,” which argues for the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy because of the “vulnerability of straight soldiers to homosexual attack in public showers.”¹⁰⁹ Toddy’s fear is not from being nude in the shower, but from being viewed by Darren. But, as Darren points out, Toddy can cover himself, and avoid the issue entirely. But the tension Greenberg

¹⁰⁶ Grant, M Shane. “Under the Rainbow: Post-Closet Gay Male Representation in American Theatre and Television.” Diss. Florida State U, 2011. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A. The Humanities and Social Sciences* 71.8 (2011): p. 40.

¹⁰⁷ Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 16.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 17

¹⁰⁹ Grant, M Shane. “Under the Rainbow: Post-Closet Gay Male Representation in American Theatre and Television.” p. 40

is illuminating is not Toddy's fear of being seen as an object of desire by Darren. Rather, Toddy is upset that what was once a place where sexuality was not an issue, has suddenly become a significant issue.

The sexualized image of men advertising products to other men has implications for both Kinsey's scale and for Toddy's potential repressed homosexual desire. A recent baseball player for the Washington Nationals, Bryce Harper, advertised elastic underwear for UnderArmour, displaying his muscularity and sex appeal while for men to look upon.¹¹⁰ While advertising for other men, Bryce Harper's sex appeal visible for the other players in the Nationals locker room. Likewise, Darren's sex appeal is on display for the Empires to gaze upon well before he announces he is gay. If any of Darren's teammates found him attractive before, it was apparently understood as permissible because of the asexual nature of the locker room. Greenberg seems to be questioning the validity of males gazing upon males in a supposedly asexual situation, and asserting that even the most homophobic, hyper masculine men are not a "0" on Kinsey's scale.¹¹¹

Darren's sexuality is no more important to him than the Empire's next opponent. As Darren pompously tells Kippy, "If I'm gonna have sex—and I *am*, because I'm young and rich and famous and talented and handsome, so it's a law—I'd rather do it with a guy, but when all is said and done, Kippy? I'd rather just play ball."¹¹² Greenberg presents Darren from the beginning as a potentially sexual being, but after Darren says he would "rather just play ball," the only sexual tension in the play occurs because the heterosexual characters create it themselves. Grant notes how the "heteronormative assumption about

¹¹⁰ <http://gamedayr.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/bryce-harper-underwear-ad.png>

¹¹¹ "0" represents exclusively heterosexual, while "6" represents exclusively homosexual.

¹¹² Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 9.

the rules and bounds of homosocial interaction” questions “heterosexual misconceptions about same-sex desire.”¹¹³ The common misconception is that gay men desire sex from all men that they encounter, which as Darren proves is not true. For the audience and for the straight characters in the play, the tension arises from their own ignorance, homophobia, constant nudity, or combination of them all, not because Darren is sexually attracted to anyone. In this way the sexual tension that results in the locker room is not because Darren is present, but rather because everyone else is present.

But, Kippy, who performs his role as narrator and interpreter beautifully, still asks the question that the audience wants to ask as well: “Why? Or why *now*?”¹¹⁴ in reference to Darren revealing that he is gay, consequently after signing the largest contract in baseball history. Toddy attempts to answer the question by blaming it on Darren’s desire for more attention. Toddy says, “Darren’s always felt this inferiority thing because his friend Davey Battle gets to be a showboat on a lousy team, see? And Darren, ‘cause we’re *good*, was thinkin’, shit, people aren’t watching *me* enough.”¹¹⁵ These last three words, “watching *me* enough” take on multiple interpretations. Perhaps Toddy, and therefore Greenberg, is saying that people aren’t paying enough attention to Darren’s skill on the baseball field. Or perhaps Greenberg is saying, people aren’t looking at Darren as a sexual being enough. Or maybe, Greenberg takes it another layer deeper, and implies that Darren wants to be seen as an object of desire by his homophobic teammates, despite the fact that he doesn’t want to have sex with any of them. Regardless, it does not occur to Toddy that Darren’s

¹¹³ Grant, M Shane. “Under the Rainbow: Post-Closet Gay Male Representation in American Theatre and Television.” p. 44.

¹¹⁴ Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 20.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 52

inferiority, if that is even what Darren feels, is not from being the star on a good team. As Kippy points out for the audience, Darren led the league in every statistical category and therefore couldn't possibly desire more attention in the way Toddy describes. More likely is the notion that Darren wanted to prove that masculinity, physical prowess, and baseball are not parallel to heterosexuality. But, because of Darren's pompousness, a final explanation is possible: he just does not care what other people think.

Shane Mungitt proves to be Darren's antagonist in the play. The Empires go into a significant slump after Darren announces his homosexuality, and the skipper promotes Shane in hopes of helping the team win. On Darren and Kippy's request, Shane shares the story of how his father killed his mother and then committed suicide while Shane was a baby. As an antagonist, Shane demands more sympathy from the audience than does Darren, despite being uneducated and racist. Shocked, Kippy and Darren leave the scene, and Kippy then informs the audience that Shane's vital flaw is his inability to speak. Greenberg sets up a conflict for the audience when Shane joins the Empires. Perhaps Shane is a product of his society, and not responsible for his homophobia. As Kippy says, Shane "doesn't know any words . . . words to name the world with . . . to shape [himself] . . . And that's always seemed to me the worst kind of hardship."¹¹⁶ However, Kippy does not excuse Shane's ignorance. On the one hand, Shane is the most racist and homophobic character in the play. On the other hand, Kippy, and therefore the audience, feels sorry for Shane. But the audience quickly forgets Shane's past when, in an interview with the media, Shane says he cannot believe he has to "shower with a faggot." Commissioner of baseball William Danziger suspended Shane promptly, but then reinstated him. Kippy offers an explanation:

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 44.

Here was one of life's castoffs. One of the people nobody ever took care of. And it's possible that our love of punishment is exceeded only by our passion to forgive. And what were a few words? Especially when the words didn't match up with what was in his...would you call it *mind*? Heart. And baseball, which is flexible, started to reconsider. And nearly everybody was almost okay with that.¹¹⁷

According to Danziger, Shane's ignorance and skill as a baseball player trumped his homophobic remarks. Shane receives a second chance, as baseball has historically allowed. But, as John Lahr believed, baseball was "a kind of mathematical absoluteness that spills over into moral absoluteness."¹¹⁸ Greenberg asserts that baseball is not as morally absolute as Lahr believed, because although baseball gives Shane a second chance, the message baseball sends to Darren is that outwardly homophobic remarks are allowed. In a letter of apology to Darren, Danziger writes that "were my son your age and gay—an option, being gay, that is, that he already knows is open to him."¹¹⁹ Danziger ignorantly implies that his own son can be gay as an "option," a belief that homosexuals refute, instead of saying that the option of being openly gay as opposed to closeted gay is nothing to be ashamed of.

Danziger symbolizes the belief of the American public in Greenberg's play, as argued by Shane Grant. While Danziger's letter to Darren at the opening of Act 2 is an apology showing outward compassion, Danziger's view of homosexuals is hypocritical. Danziger says "*But do you have to play BASEBALL? Don't you know what baseball means to me? I wish you well in all other things, but this hurts my feelings.*"¹²⁰ Grant argues that Danziger views Darren as "an assault on baseball," and therefore an assault on American society. Grant says, "Danziger's apparent tolerance or acceptance of homosexuality itself becomes

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 60.

¹¹⁸ Lahr, John. "Play at the Plate: Losing it in the locker room." p. 80.

¹¹⁹ Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 47.

¹²⁰ Ibid., 48

falsified and discredited by his disgust with Darren's chosen profession in relation to his sexual orientation."¹²¹ Grant argues that Greenberg inserts Danziger as "a reminder of the millions of heterosexual Americans who claim desire for equality, yet then vote against pro-gay legislation come election time."¹²² Danziger, for all intents and purposes, represents the American public, which believes baseball is "asexual, that is until Darren desecrates the game."¹²³ Danziger, who never saw baseball as political, takes personal offense to Darren's "desecration" of the game. With Danziger's apology letter, Greenberg gives the audience another excuse to sympathize with Darren. But more importantly, as Danziger represents American society, the audience is confronted with their own hypocrisy.

Despite the Empires' and Commissioner's homophobic ignorance, Darren receives compassion from fans. Darren tells Kippy he "want[s] slurs—brickbats—epithets" from the fans, which would prove society's homophobia. During their conversation Kippy hugs Darren with compassion, as noted in the stage directions, upon which Darren calls Kippy a "fuckin' faggot."¹²⁴ Darren sets himself up as a martyr in the play, but is unable to impose change on society when the public supports him, and since he doesn't receive death threats, "slurs," or "epithets," he creates them himself. If Darren wanted to send a pro-gay message to the public, it seems that he failed in doing so, because Darren's sexuality does not bother the public in any way. Or perhaps, Darren believes that below the surface of the compassion lies a suppressed homophobia that he expresses instead of the public. From the end of Act 1 onward, Darren is no longer the smooth and in-control star of the team

¹²¹ Grant, M Shane. "Under the Rainbow: Post-Closet Gay Male Representation in American Theatre and Television." p. 39.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 49.

that he once was. Shane becomes Darren's "Achilles' heel," and Darren finds it difficult to accept that a "moron" has the ability to get under his skin.

When Danziger reinstates Shane to the Empires, Darren further loses control of the situation, and as the plot thickens, Darren only communicates openly with Mason, his potentially homosexual accountant, Davey, and Kippy. The manager, who claims to view Darren neutrally, and the rest of the Empires drift away from Darren. After Darren tells the manager that it would not be right if Shane returned to the team, the manager says, "All sorts of things aren't right . . . is it right for instance, for somebody to land one of the fattest contracts in baseball history and only then reveal his interesting little personal quirk? Is *that* 'right'? I ask you."¹²⁵ The manager asks the audience as well as Darren for support in the decision to allow Shane back on the team. Darren responds boldly: "I'm speaking as an African-American, of course. Not as a cocksucker."¹²⁶ Before this moment in the play, Darren only mentions his sexuality on a sexual level when he tells Kippy he doesn't "want to fuck any of you" at the beginning of Act 1. Darren's desire to name himself as a "cocksucker" shows a transformation in Darren's personality. In Act 1 Darren owns himself, and he is in complete control of his situation and his sexuality. By the end of Act 1, Darren is receiving compassion from everyone except his teammates, and Greenberg might be suggesting that in order to prompt social change, the oppressed must generate sympathy. Perhaps to receive a negative reaction, Darren calls himself a "cocksucker" since nobody else has yet.

Despite the set up of the play structure with Darren as the protagonist and Shane as the antagonist, Darren and Shane share striking similarities. Greenberg generates

¹²⁵ Ibid., 62.

¹²⁶ Ibid., 63.

sympathy for both characters by giving the audience the sense that neither Shane nor Darren is responsible for their situations. Shane cannot help that his background brought him up as an uneducated homophobe, nor can Darren help that he is gay. Greenberg displays a deeper similarity between Darren and Shane through their usage of sexual slurs, namely “faggot,” and “cocksucker.” When Shane calls Darren a “faggot,” the audience understands that Shane does not understand the word belittles gay people. But when Darren calls Kippy a “fuckin faggot,” and himself a “cocksucker,” Greenberg’s intentions are ambiguous and an explicit explanation is not supplied. Perhaps Darren uses these terms because he wants a reaction, or maybe he wants to say what everyone else is thinking but not saying. Regardless, Greenberg supplies a highly sexualized protagonist who for the entirety of the play does not engage in coitus, nor allude to his intentions of seeking it out,

This idea of indentifying oneself with language occurs throughout the play. When Darren announces his homosexuality, the entire team and the media both amplify the situation beyond Darren’s calculation.

DARREN: “Kippy, This seems to be a bigger event in your life than it is in mine.”

KIPPY: “I’m just happy for you, Darren.”

DARREN: “Why?”

KIPPY: “Because now *you’re* gonna be happy.”

DARREN: “I’ve always *been* happy.”

KIPPY: “But now you’ll be *completely* happy. You’ve *named* yourself, Darren—you’ve put yourself into *words*—which means you’re free in a way you’ve never been before.”¹²⁷

Despite Kippy’s assertion that Darren will now be happy and free, it is clear throughout the play that Darren is not free, nor is he happy. Darren cannot shower in the locker room without his teammates alienating him. Darren has to handle the uneducated bigotry of the

¹²⁷ Ibid., 12

majority of his teammates, and also has to continue to perform well on the baseball field. By naming himself as gay, Darren ceases to be just a baseball player, and becomes the first and only gay baseball player. For Kippy, putting “yourself into *words*,” has the ability to liberate. Therefore, according to Kippy, Shane is not free, as Shane tries to avoid language at all costs. Shane says, “I Didn’t know mosta those words meant bad stuff, I just been hearin’ them my whole life. The onliest thing I can do is throw—onliest thing I ever could do.”¹²⁸ Shane’s lack of the ability to use language proves to be a fatal flaw at the end of act two, when Shane overhears Darren, Kippy, and Davey talking in the locker room. As perhaps a way to get back on the good side with the team, Shane takes the conversation literally.

DAVEY: I wish you a good game, my man.

KIPPY: You as well, my man.

DAVEY: We’re gonna whup your ass.

KIPPY: We’re gonna kill you.

(*Lights.*)¹²⁹

While Kippy’s line “We’re gonna kill you,” is merely a jocular form of intimidation, Shane literally kills Davey, providing palpable irony for Greenberg’s play.

Language also plays an important role for the foreign players on the Empires, namely Rodriguez, Martinez, and Kawabata. Right before Shane kills Davey with a fastball, Greenberg gives the audience a scene in the dugout, highlighting the communication barrier between the foreign players, the rest of the players, and the audience.

TODDY: Don’t talk to the fucker, don’t talk to the fucker, whatever you do, don’t *talk* to the—

SKIPPER: Toddy!

TODDY: Yeah, Skip?

¹²⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 75

SKIPPER: Nobody ever talks to the fucker, the fucker doesn't speak English.¹³⁰

Greenberg cleverly mixes humor into the narrative just before Kawabata's loss of dominance in the ninth inning and Davey Battle's subsequent death when Shane takes over on the mound. Earlier in Act 2, Greenberg includes a conversation between Martinez and Rodriguez in which they speak un-translated Spanish to each other in the locker room. When translated, Rodriguez and Martinez, in a hyper masculine jocularity, compare each other's penis size. a conversation that would cause little tension in a supposedly asexual locker room. However, now that Darren is openly gay, Rodriguez and Martinez's dialogue becomes sexualized. Yet, Greenberg ostracizes Darren from Martinez and Rodriguez through a language barrier, further suggesting that language can define, as Kippy uses it, destroy, as the homophobes use it, and hinder, as illustrated with Martinez and Rodriguez. Kippy decides against translating Martinez and Rodriguez's conversation for the sake of the team, who are lingering in the "hotbed of sexual tension."¹³¹ Greenberg is likely question why behavior that is seemingly gay, which looking at and comparing penis size seems to be, not interpreted as gay until a openly gay man is present? Perhaps Greenberg disguised Martinez and Rodriguez's dialogue to raise the sexual tension, though it is more likely that he disguised the conversation to symbolize the inner thoughts that every heterosexual male eventually has in a locker room shower. In this way, the unsaid is said, but remains untranslated.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 79

¹³¹ Grant, M Shane. "Under the Rainbow: Post-Closet Gay Male Representation in American Theatre and Television." Diss. Florida State U, 2011. *Dissertation Abstracts International, Section A. The Humanities and Social Sciences* 71.8 (2011): p. 40.

Perhaps the largest failure of language occurs after Darren confronts and mortifies Shane in the shower. Perhaps as another attempt to induce a reaction, “(*Darren rushes [Shane], embraces him from behind*)”¹³² while they are alone in the shower. Startled, Shane fights him off, but “(*Darren kisses him. Shane thrashes his way out of Darren’s embrace*)”¹³³ Darren then tells Shane it is “our little secret,” which mortifies Shane, as he literally lives his homophobic nightmare. Shane runs out of the shower screaming, and in the subsequent game’s last inning he kills Davey with a fastball to the head. In an interview, Toddy and Jason mention that they heard Shane “threatening” to kill someone as he came out of the shower, but as Toddy and Jason say, “we tried mostly not to listen to Shane Mungitt.”¹³⁴

TODDY: But, so, anyway, he *passed* us, comin’ out of the shower, an’ he said—

JASON: “I *hate* you all”—

TODDY: To all of us—

JASON: To everybody—

TODDY: He just said—

JASON: “I *hate* you all.”

TODDY: ...Anyway, we thought that was encouraging

JASON: We thought, okay, today he’s gonna have control...But then he said—

TODDY: He said—

JASON: “You watch me when I get out there—I’m gonna *kill* somebody—I’m gonna take somebody out.”

TODDY: ...Anyway, we thought that was encouraging.

JASON: Yeah we did.¹³⁵

Herein lies another massive language barrier between the characters of *Take Me Out*. Shane explicitly states he is going to kill someone, but Jason and Toddy interpret Shane’s words differently. Darren begins to feel guilty for Davey’s death while he is talking to Mason. Darren says, “They should arrest everybody . . . they should arrest me.”¹³⁶ Before Davey’s

¹³² Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. p. 78.

¹³³ Ibid.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 89.

¹³⁵ Ibid.

¹³⁶ Ibid., 90.

death, Darren was invincible. Despite society's stigma on homosexuality in sports, Darren remains the best player on the best team with the biggest contract in baseball. But Davey's death deflates Darren, especially after Darren realizes he is partially responsible for Davey's death because of the incident with Shane in the shower.

Language fails the characters in the play one final time when Kippy and Darren try to communicate with Shane about Davey's death in an attempt to "make the indeterminate, determinate."¹³⁷ But, Kippy says Shane "said nothing . . . He just sort of alternated silence and babble."¹³⁸ The scene between Shane, Kippy and Darren unravels the core of the play. Kippy wants to understand through words, and both Kippy and Darren think they understand Shane because they label him at the beginning of the play. Kippy says, "I thought . . . I knew who he really *was* . . . I thought I was the only one who did."¹³⁹ But only Shane knows who Shane is. Shane is a pitcher who only has one pitch. When everyone else forces language onto Shane, he tries to fit in, but publically fails when he expresses his homophobia in the media interview. But by the end of the final conversation, Kippy and Darren have internal realizations that visibly don't sit well in their stomachs. From the stage directions, Darren "*(shakes his head, trying to dismiss it, but also guilty, and turns away from KIPPY. KIPPY registers this, then quickly decides to ignore it.)*" and later "*(Kippy freezes)*"¹⁴⁰ Greenberg spins a new web at the end of the play. From the beginning, the audience understands that Kippy and Darren are masters of their own language, and they come to define everything with words and feel a strong desire to do so. But, Shane turns

¹³⁷ Ibid., 105.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 107.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 102-106.

that notion upside down, and by the end of the play, Kippy and Darren are no longer in control.

Darren's accountant, Mason, becomes the only character in *Take Me Out* who seems to achieve happiness at the conclusion of the play. Arguably because of Darren coming out, Mason becomes a baseball fan, and explains the beauty of the game to the audience. Mason says,

"I have been watching baseball nonstop since the day I was told you were coming to me. And at first it was a chore. I understood nothing. I couldn't tell one player from another. And then I *could*. And it wasn't a chore any longer, it was . . . this . . . astonishment! This . . . *abundance*. So much to learn, so much to memorize . . . I don't know why I feel exalted when we win. I don't know why I feel diminished when we lose. I don't know why I'm saying "we" . . .!"¹⁴¹

Mason expresses the love for the game that so many American's feel, but his introduction to the game came from Darren's announcement. Mason thanks Darren for introducing him to baseball, and remains the only character in the play to experience happiness on any level. Although Mason and Darren do not express sexual attraction toward each other, they share a love for the game of baseball that straight and gay communities share alike. Greenberg draws a parallel to both the greatness of baseball, and to the direct similarity between straight and gay people. It seems Mason's deluge of baseball activity and knowledge symbolizes anyone's same obsession, whether they are gay or straight, black or white, male or female.

Richard Greenberg makes deliberate choices in his play to promote an acknowledgement of homosexuality where it is, at the time of the premier in 2003, unacknowledged, as well as critique the hypocrisy of American society. Baseball is the

¹⁴¹ Ibid. 71-2.

sport that symbolizes American society, and for the American public, like William Danziger, baseball has a deep cultural and spiritual significance. Greenberg writes *Take Me Out* as a baseball play to critique all of the hypocritical institutions of society: the military, religious institutions, education, and sports. As drama has a duty to instigate change, Greenberg's play certainly forces the audience to cope with their own notions of sexuality as well as see the issue unfold in front of them in a manner parallel to the world around them.

Home Plate

The Conclusion

Though significantly different, Greenberg, Wilson and Abbott utilized plays set in the world of baseball as a mechanism to critique society and promote positive improvement. *Damn Yankees* analyzed the notions of masculinity during a time period that offered two conflicting notions of what it meant to be a man, while also questioning the woman's role in that society. *Fences* illuminates a similar time period from the viewpoint of the African American. Wilson's play uses the accompanying racism that American society projected onto African American culture for hundreds of years to critique social injustice, while offering insight into the generational gap between the young and old and their expectations. *Take Me Out* presents a critique of the homophobic side of American society, both literally forcing the audience to view full frontal male nudity, but also forcing the audience to watch as social inequality and homophobia tears down the hyper masculine star athlete. However, the world of baseball serves different purposes in each of the plays. In *Damn Yankees* and *Take Me Out*, baseball is at the forefront, with players on a professional team, a locker room and a season to be played. *Damn Yankees* features a journey of a man through a season as well as through himself. There are dugout scenes, locker room scenes, and in some senses a decent understanding of the game of baseball helps inform the play. *Take Me Out* also features a lot of the same scenery: dugouts, locker rooms, showers, and teammates and coaches as characters. *Fences* uses baseball more as a metaphor, as Troy has passed his athletic prime and is working as a garbage collector. Thus, Wilson shows the separation between the negative, black vision of the American dream, and the hopeful, white vision.

In *Take Me Out*, Kippy summarizes the differing role that baseball plays in society. In reference to Shane Mungitt, Kippy says,

Here was one of life's castoffs. One of the people nobody ever took care of. And it's possible that our love of punishment is exceeded only by our passion to forgive. And what were a few words? Especially when the words didn't match up with what was in his...would you call it *mind*? Heart. And baseball, which is flexible, started to reconsider. And nearly everybody was almost okay with that.¹⁴²

This monologue to the audience digs at the heart of the relationship between *Take Me Out*, *Fences*, and *Damn Yankees*. Kippy calls baseball "flexible," which is true. Baseball itself is, and has been flexible since it began. But how society views baseball delivers a different outcome. For example, the same way baseball is "flexible" for Shane it is stiff for Darren. The same way sports are "flexible" for Cory, they are stiff for Troy. A key difference between baseball's flexibility lies in the ability to "view" the socially oppressed. In *Fences*, the differing skin color is readily and easily recognizable, unlike in *Take Me Out*, where Darren is allowed to play professionally because his "secret" was a matter of sexual preference instead of skin color. Even in *Damn Yankees*, Mr. Applegate tries to prevent Joe from playing baseball, and patriarchal society restricts Joe's freedom to play.

Integral to each play's message is the nature of the art form, which is live performance. The play as an art form forces the audience to confront the issues in the society in which they live in a way that a novel or painting cannot. The audience of *Damn Yankees* watches as the women are subjugated by dominant male figures, and as Joe presents the audience with conflicting notions of masculinity with no readily available answer. *Fences*' audience watches Troy, a product of his past, struggle with the widening generational gap between him and Cory. Troy's past seasons his present, whereas Cory's past and present season the future for all African Americans. The audience is forced, in an overtly literal way, to confront homosexuality and homophobia in *Take Me Out*, when

¹⁴² Greenberg, Richard. *Take Me Out*. New York: Faber and Faber Incorporated, 2003. p. 60.

presented with full frontal male nudity on stage. The resulting issues in *Take Me Out* present the audience with a chilling critique of the homophobic and hypocritical culture of American society that outwardly supports equality while suppressing equality on political ballots, in sports, and in the military. The play as an art form, baseball, and the characters that fill the play, combine to transmit a dark interpretation of society's flaws. While baseball offers a positive theme for the setting, filled with the capitalist notion of a winner and a loser, the playwrights ask questions that have no answers and result in ambiguity and stalemate.

Another common thread binding the three plays together is each character's conflict with morality during the time period, and the conflict between the individual and society. In all three plays, society trumps the individual, in part because of each character's failure with language. *Damn Yankees* results in society trumping Joe as he retreats to his home. *Fences* results in society trumping Troy figuratively and literally, in Troy's death. *Take Me Out* results in society trumping Darren in Shane's reinstatement to baseball and Davey's death, leaving the moral compass of the play ambiguous. Additionally, each play features idealized protagonists, all of which do not achieve happiness. Joe Hardy does not achieve happiness because he turns back into Joe Boyd, the common man. Troy and Darren are both idealized versions of the oppressed, yet their resulting happiness is non-existent. Darren accurately characterizes the ideal notion of a man, but leaves out one significant aspect. Darren says he is "young and rich and famous and talented and handsome," but he does not say he is happy. As American culture is flooded with the Declaration of Independence's guarantee that all men have "certain unalienable rights, that among these

are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,”¹⁴³ it seems that Abbott, Wilson, and Greenberg agree that American society’s ideals of the pursuit of happiness are unrealistic, idealized and truncated paradigms. At the conclusion of each play, the only characters who are completely satisfied and happy with their lives are Gloria in *Damn Yankees*, Gabriel in *Fences*, and Mason in *Take Me Out*. In this way, Abbott, Wilson, and Greenberg imply that attaining the American ideal is not necessarily required to achieve happiness. While the protagonists of each play struggle to self identify in their societies, the audience reconstructs their own notions of identity, and questions the society in which they live. All three plays simultaneously maintain the entertainment factor that made them all award-winning plays.

¹⁴³ (US Const. Art. 1 sec. 2)

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